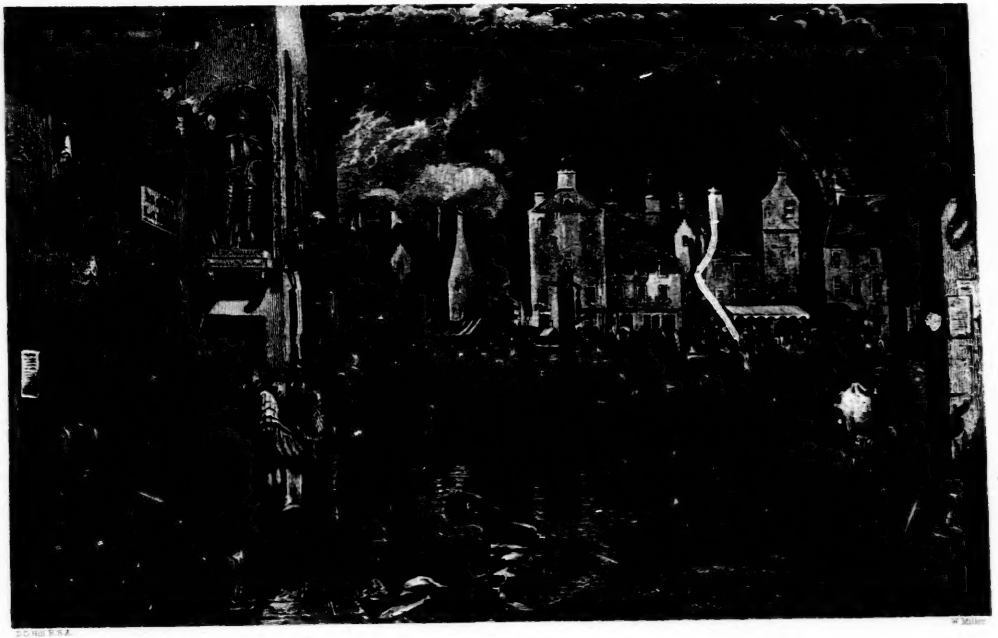
THE WORKS
OF
ROBERT BURNS.



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THE WORKS

OF

ROBERT BURNS.

WITH

A SERIES OF AUTHENTIC

PICTORIAL ILLUSTRATIONS,

MARGINAL GLOSSARY, NUMEROUS NOTES, AND APPENDIXES:

ALSO

THE LIFE OF BURNS, BY J. G. LOCKHART;
AND ESSAYS ON THE GENIUS, CHARACTER, AND WRITINGS OF BURNS,
BY THOMAS CARLYLE AND PROFESSOR WILSON.

EDITED BY

CHARLES ANNANDALE, M.A., LL.D.,
EDITOR OF THE "IMPERIAL DICTIONARY," ETC.

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Portrait of
Friars' Car
Alloway K
Portrait of

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THE WORKS OF ROBERT BURNS.

GENERAL CORRESPONDENCE.

TO ——[1]

What you may think of this letter when you see the name that subscribes it I cannot know; and perhaps I ought to make a long preface of apologies for the freedom I am going to take; but as my heart means no offence, but on the contrary is rather too warmly interested in your favour, for that reason I hope you will forgive me when I tell you that I most sincerely and affectionately love you. I am a stranger in these matters, A—, as I assure you that you are the first woman to whom I ever made such a declaration, so I declare I am at a loss how to proceed.—I have more than once come into your company with an intention to tell you what I have just now told you, but my resolution[2] always failed me, and even now my heart trembles for the consequence of what I have said. I hope, my dear A—, you will not despise me because I am ignorant of the flattering arts of courtship; I hope my inexperience of the world will plead for me.—I can only say I sincerely love you, and there is nothing on earth I so ardently wish for, or could possibly give me so much happiness, as one day to see you mine.—I think you cannot doubt my sincerity, as I am sure that whenever I see you my very looks betray me, and when once you are convinced I am sincere, I am pretty certain you have too much goodness and humanity to allow an honest man to languish in suspence only because he loves you too well, but I am certain that in such a state of anxiety as I myself at present feel an absolute denial would be a much preferable state.—

[1] The original MS. of this letter (apparently a draft or scroll) bears no date, address, or signature, but as Mr. W. Scott Douglas points out, "the style of penmanship betokens its early date." It may have been written by the poet merely for practice and not to any real correspondent, or perhaps as was composed for some friend less skilled in letter-writing. Or it may have been the first of the short series of letters addressed to Ellison Begbie which next follow.

This letter was first published, with a facsimile of the MS., in the *Library Edition of Burns* (W. Paterson, Edin. 1877-79), edited by Mr. Douglas.

[2] Above this word "intention" is interlined in the MS.

TO ELLISON (OR ALISON) BEGBIE.[3]

[LOCHLEA, 1780 or 1781.]

MY DEAR E.,

I do not remember in the course of your acquaintance and mine, ever to have heard your opinion on the ordinary way of falling in love, amongst people in our station in life; I do not mean the persons who proceed in the way of bargain, but those whose affection is really placed on the person.

Though I be, as you know very well, but a very awkward lover myself, yet as I have some opportunities of observing the conduct of others who are much better skilled in the affair of courtship than I am, I often think it is owing to lucky chance more than to good management, that there are not more unhappy marriages than usually are.

It is natural for a young fellow to like the

[3] The daughter of a small farmer in the parish of Galston. She was about 1780-81 a servant with a family on the banks of the Cessnock about two miles from the farm of the Burnses. See note to song "On Cessnock Banks," vol. i. p. 196.

acquaintance of the females, and customary for him to keep them company when occasion serves; some one of them is more agreeable to him than the rest; there is something, he knows not what, pleases him, he knows not how, in her company. This I take to be what is called love with the greater part of us; and I must own, my dear E., it is a hard game such a one as you have to play when you meet with such a lover. You cannot admit but he is sincere, and yet though you use him ever so favourably, perhaps in a few months, or at farthest in a year or two, the same unaccountable fancy may make him as distractedly fond of another, whilst you are quite forgot. I am aware that perhaps the next time I have the pleasure of seeing you, you may bid me take my own lesson home, and tell me that the passion I have professed for you is perhaps one of those transient flashes I have been describing; but I hope, my dear E., you will do me the justice to believe me, when I assure you, that the love I have for you is founded on the sacred principles of virtue and honour, and by consequence so long as you continue possessed of those amiable qualities which first inspired my passion for you, so long must I continue to love you. Believe me, my dear, it is love like this alone which can render the marriage state happy. People may talk of flames and raptures as long as they please, and a warm fancy, with a flow of youthful spirits, may make them feel somewhat like what they describe; but sure I am the nobler faculties of the mind, with kindred feelings of the heart, can only be the foundation of friendship, and it has always been my opinion, that the married life was only friendship in a more exalted degree. If you will be so good as to grant my wishes, and it should please Providence to spare us to the latest period of life, I can look forward and see that even then, though bent down with wrinkled age; even then, when all other worldly circumstances will be indifferent to me, I will regard my E. with the tenderest affection, and for this plain reason, because she is still possessed of those noble qualities, improved to a much higher degree, which first inspired my affection for her.

O! happy state when souls each other draw,
Where love is liberty, and nature law.

I know were I to speak in such a style to many a girl, who thinks herself possessed of no small share of sense, she would think it ridiculous; but the language of the heart is, my dear E., the only courtship I shall ever use to you.

When I look over what I have written, I am sensible it is vastly different from the ordinary style of courtship, but I shall make no apology—I know your good nature will excuse what your good sense may see amiss. —R. B.

TO THE SAME.

LOCHLEA, [1780–1781].

I verily believe, my dear E., that the pure genuine feelings of love are as rare in the world as the pure genuine principles of virtue and piety. This, I hope, will account for the uncommon style of all my letters to you. By uncommon, I mean their being written in such a hasty manner, which, to tell you the truth, has made me often afraid lest you should take me for some zealous bigot, who conversed with his mistress as he would converse with his minister. I don't know how it is, my dear, for though, except your company, there is nothing on earth gives me so much pleasure as writing to you, yet it never gives me those giddy raptures so much talked of among lovers. I have often thought, that if a well-grounded affection be not really a part of virtue, 'tis something extremely akin to it. Whenever the thought of my E. warms my heart, every feeling of humanity, every principle of generosity kindles in my breast. It extinguishes every dirty spark of malice and envy which are but too apt to infest me. I grasp every creature in the arms of universal benevolence, and equally participate in the pleasures of the happy, and sympathize with the miseries of the unfortunate. I assure you, my dear, I often look up to the Divine Disposer of events with an eye of gratitude for the blessing which I hope he intends to bestow on me in bestowing you. I sincerely wish that He may bless my endeavours to make your life as comfortable and happy as possible, both in sweetening the rougher parts of my natural temper, and bettering the unkindly circumstances of

my fortune. This, my dear, is a passion, at least in my view, worthy of a man, and I will add worthy of a Christian. The sordid earth-worm may profess love to a woman's person, while in reality his affection is centred in her pocket; and the slavish drudge may go a-wooing as he goes to the horse-market to choose one who is stout and firm, and, as we may say of an old horse, one who will be a good drudge and draw kindly. I disdain their dirty, puny ideas. I would be heartily out of humour with myself, if I thought I were capable of having so poor a notion of the sex which was designed to crown the pleasures of society. Poor devils! I don't envy them their happiness who have such notions. For my part I propose quite other pleasures with my dear partner.—R. B.

TO THE SAME.

[LOCHLEA, 1780–81.]

I have often thought it a peculiarly unlucky circumstance in love, that though, in every other situation in life, telling the truth is not only the safest, but actually by far the easiest way of proceeding, a lover is never under greater difficulty in acting, or more puzzled for expression, than when his passion is sincere, and his intentions are honourable. I do not think that it is very difficult for a person of ordinary capacity to talk of love and fondness, which are not felt, and to make vows of constancy and fidelity, which are never intended to be performed, if he be villain enough to practise such detestable conduct: but to a man whose heart glows with the principles of integrity and truth, and who sincerely loves a woman of amiable person, uncommon refinement of sentiment and purity of manners—to such a one, in such circumstances, I can assure you, my dear, from my own feelings at this present moment, courtship is a task indeed. There is such a number of foreboding fears, and distrustful anxieties crowd into my mind when I am in your company, or when I sit down to write to you, that what to speak or what to write, I am altogether at a loss.

There is one rule which I have hitherto practised, and which I shall invariably keep with you, and that is, honestly to tell you the plain truth. There is something so mean and unmanly in the arts of dissimulation and falsehood, that I am surprised they can be acted by any one in so noble, so generous a passion, as virtuous love. No, my dear E., I shall never endeavour to gain your favour by such detestable practices. If you will be so good and so generous as to admit me for your partner, your companion, your bosom friend through life, there is nothing on this side of eternity shall give me greater transport; but I shall never think of purchasing your hand by any arts unworthy of a man, and I will add, of a Christian. There is one thing, my dear, which I earnestly request of you, and it is this; that you would soon either put an end to my hopes by a peremptory refusal, or cure me of my fears by a generous consent.

It would oblige me much if you would send me a line or two when convenient. I shall only add further, that, if a behaviour regulated (though perhaps but very imperfectly) by the rules of honour and virtue, if a heart devoted to love and esteem you, and an earnest endeavour to promote your happiness; if these are qualities you would wish in a friend, in a husband, I hope you shall ever find them in your real friend and sincere lover,

R. B.

TO THE SAME.

[LOCHLEA, 1781.]

I ought, in good manners, to have acknowledged the receipt of your letter before this time, but my heart was so shocked with the contents of it, that I can scarcely yet collect my thoughts so as to write you on the subject. I will not attempt to describe what I felt on receiving your letter. I read it over and over, again and again, and though it was in the politest language of refusal, still it was peremptory; "you were sorry you could not make me a return, but you wish me," what, without you, I never can obtain, "you wish me all kind of happiness." It would be weak and unmanly to say that without you I never can be happy; but sure I am, that sharing life with you would have given it a relish, that, wanting you, I can never taste.

Your uncommon personal advantages, and

your superior good sense, do not so much strike me; these, possibly, may be met with in a few instances in others; but that amiable goodness, that tender feminine softness, that endearing sweetness of disposition, with all the charming offspring of a warm feeling heart —these I never again expect to meet with, in such a degree, in this world. All these charming qualities, heightened by an education much beyond any thing I have ever met in any woman I ever dared to approach, have made an impression on my heart that I do not think the world can ever efface. My imagination has fondly flattered myself with a wish, I dare not say it ever reached a hope, that possibly I might one day call you mine. I had formed the most delightful images, and my fancy fondly brooded over them; but now I am wretched for the loss of what I really had no right to expect. I must now think no more of you as a mistress; still I presume to ask to be admitted as a friend. As such I wish to be allowed to wait on you, and as I expect to remove in a few days a little further off, and you, I suppose, will soon leave this place, I wish to see or hear from you soon; and if an expression should perhaps escape me, rather too warm for friendship, I hope you will pardon it in, my dear Miss—(pardon me the dear expression for once) * * * *

R. B.[1]

TO WILLIAM BURNESS.[2]

IRVINE, Dec. 27, 1781.

HONOURED SIR,

I have purposely delayed writing in the hope that I should have the pleasure of seeing you on New Year's-day; but work comes so hard upon us, that I do not choose to be absent on that account, as well as for some other little reasons, which I shall tell you at meeting. My health is nearly the same as when you were here, only my sleep is a little sounder, and on the whole I am rather better than otherwise, though I mend by very slow degrees. The weakness of my nerves has so debilitated my mind, that I dare neither review past wants, nor look forward into futurity; for the least anxiety or perturbation in my breast produces most unhappy effects on my whole frame. Sometimes, indeed, when for an hour or two my spirits are a little lightened, I *glimmer* a little into futurity; but my principal, and indeed my only pleasurable, employment is looking backwards and forwards in a moral and religious way. I am quite transported at the thought, that ere long, perhaps very soon, I shall bid an eternal adieu to all the pains, and uneasiness, and disquietudes of this weary life; for I assure you I am heartily tired of it; and if I do not very much deceive myself, I could contentedly and gladly resign it.

[1] Lockhart and Motherwell both express a favourable opinion of the letters to Ellison Begbie, yet Dr. Hately Waddell, one of the warmest eulogists of the poet, says of them pithily and, as we think, justly:—"After such sermonizing the result was by no means wonderful." They look as if copied from a "Complete Letter Writer," or a novel of the Richardson type.

[2] "One of the most striking letters in the Collection (Cromek's *Reliques of Burns*), and, to us, one of the most interesting, is the earliest of the whole series; being addressed to his father in 1781, six or seven years before his name had been heard out of his own family. The author was then a common flax-dresser, and his father a poor peasant;—yet there is not one trait of vulgarity either in the thought or expression; but, on the contrary, a dignity and elevation of sentiment which must have been considered as of good omen in a youth of much higher condition."—JEFFREY.

"This letter, written several years before the publication of his poems, when his name was as obscure as his condition was humble, displays the philosophic melancholy which so generally forms the poetical temperament, and that buoyant and ambitious spirit which indicates a mind conscious of its strength. At Irvine, Burns at this time possessed a single room for his lodgings, rented perhaps at the rate of a shilling a-week. He passed his days in constant labour as a flax-dresser, and his food consisted chiefly of oatmeal, sent to him from his father's family. The store of this humble, though wholesome nutriment, it appears, was nearly exhausted, and he was about to borrow till he should obtain a supply. Yet even in this situation his active imagination had formed to itself pictures of eminence and distinction. His despair of making a figure in the world shows how ardently he wished for honourable fame; and his contempt of life, founded on this despair, is the genuine expression of a youthful and generous mind. In such a state of reflection and of suffering the imagination of Burns naturally passed the dark boundaries of our earthly horizon and rested on those beautiful creations of a better world, where there is neither thirst, nor hunger, nor sorrow, and where happiness shall be in proportion to the capacity of happiness."—CURRIE.

The soul, uneasy, and confined at home,
Rests and expatiates in a life to come.[1]

It is for this reason I am more pleased with the 15th, 16th, and 17th verses of the 7th chapter of Revelations, than with any ten times as many verses in the whole Bible, and would not exchange the noble enthusiasm with which they inspire me for all that this world has to offer. As for this world, I despair of ever making a figure in it. I am not formed for the bustle of the busy, nor the flutter of the gay. I shall never again be capable of entering into such scenes. Indeed, I am altogether unconcerned at the thoughts of this life. I foresee that poverty and obscurity probably await me, and I am, in some measure, prepared, and daily preparing to meet them. I have but just time and paper to return you my grateful thanks for the lessons of virtue and piety you have given me, which were too much neglected at the time of giving them, but which I hope have been remembered ere it is yet too late. Present my dutiful respects to my mother, and my compliments to Mr. and Mrs. Muir; and with wishing you a merry New-Year's-day, I shall conclude. I am, honoured Sir, your dutiful Son,

ROBERT BURNESS.

P. S. My meal is nearly out, but I am going to borrow till I get more.

TO SIR JOHN WHITEFOORD, BART.,

OF BALLOCHMYLE.

SIR,

We who subscribe this are both members of St. James's Lodge, Tarbolton, and one of us in the office of Warden, and as we have the honour of having you for master of our Lodge, we hope you will excuse this freedom, as you are the proper person to whom we ought to apply. We look on our mason lodge to be a serious matter, both with respect to the character of masonry itself, and likewise as it is a charitable society. This last indeed does not interest you farther than a benevolent heart is interested in the welfare of its fellow-creatures; but to us, Sir, who are of the lower orders of mankind, to have a fund in view, on which we may with certainty depend to be kept from want should we be in circumstances of distress or old age, this is a matter of importance.

We are sorry to observe that our Lodge's affairs with respect to its finances, have for a good while been in a wretched situation. We have considerable sums in bills which lie by without being paid or put in execution, and many of our members never mind their yearly dues or anything else belonging to the Lodge. And since the separation from St. David's, we are not sure even of our existence as a Lodge. There has been a dispute before the Grand Lodge, but how decided, or if decided at all, we know not.

For these and other reasons we humbly beg the favour of you, as soon as convenient, to call a meeting, and let us consider on some means to retrieve our wretched affairs. We are, &c.[2]

TO MR. JOHN MURDOCH,

SCHOOLMASTER,

STAPLES INN BUILDINGS, LONDON.[3]

LOCHLEA, 15th Jan. 1783.

DEAR SIR,

As I have an opportunity of sending you a letter without putting you to that expense which any production of mine would but ill repay, I embrace it with pleasure, to tell you that I have not forgotten, nor ever will forget, the many obligations I lie under to your kindness and friendship.

[1] Hope springs eternal in the human breast:
Man never is, but always to be, blest:
The soul, uneasy and confined from home,
Rests and expatiates in a life to come.—POPE.

[2] The separation of the St. David's and St. James's Freemason Lodges of Tarbolton, referred to above, took place in June, 1782, and the above letter was probably written shortly after that event. It exists as a scroll on the back of the draft of the letter which we print as the first of his correspondence. It was, like it, first published in the *Library Edition of Burns* (Edin. 1877-79).

Respecting Sir J. Whitefoord, see note to a letter afterwards addressed to him by Burns.

[3] Mr. John Murdoch, as narrated in the Life, was the poet's early teacher. He died in London, where he had been long resident, in 1824. He was author of several books connected with his profession of a schoolmaster. See Life.

I doubt not, Sir, but you will wish to know what has been the result of all the pains of an indulgent father and a masterly teacher; and I wish I could gratify your curiosity with such a recital as you would be pleased with: but that is what I am afraid will not be the case. I have, indeed, kept pretty clear of vicious habits; and in this respect, I hope, my conduct will not disgrace the education I have gotten; but, as a man of the world, I am most miserably deficient. One would have thought that, bred, as I have been, under a father who has figured pretty well as *un homme des affaires*, I might have been, what the world calls, a pushing, active fellow; but to tell you the truth, Sir, there is hardly any thing more my reverse. I seem to be one sent into the world to see and observe; and I very easily compound with the knave who tricks me of my money, if there be any thing original about him, which shows me human nature in a different light from any thing I have seen before. In short, the joy of my heart is to "study men, their manners, and their ways;" and for this darling subject, I cheerfully sacrifice every other consideration. I am quite indolent about those great concerns that set the bustling, busy sons of care agog; and if I have to answer for the present hour, I am very easy with regard to any thing further. Even the last, worst shift of the unfortunate and the wretched does not much terrify me: I know that, even then, my talent for what country folks call "a sensible crack," when once it is sanctified by a hoary head, would procure me so much esteem, that even then—I would learn to be happy.[1] However, I am under no apprehensions about that; for though indolent, yet so far as an extremely delicate constitution permits, I am not lazy; and in many things, especially in tavern matters, I am a strict economist; not, indeed, for the sake of the money; but one of the principal parts in my composition is a kind of pride of stomach, and I scorn to fear the face of any man living: above every thing, I abhor as hell, the idea of sneaking in a corner to avoid a dun—possibly some pitiful, sordid wretch, who in my heart I despise and detest. 'Tis this, and this alone, that endears economy to me.[2] In the matter of books, indeed, I am very profuse. My favourite authors are of the sentimental kind, such as Shenstone, particularly his *Elegies;* Thomson; *Man of Feeling*[3]—a book I prize next to the Bible; *Man of the World;* Sterne, especially his *Sentimental Journey;* Macpherson's *Ossian*, &c.; these are the glorious models after which I endeavour to form my conduct, and 'tis incongruous, 'tis absurd to suppose that the man whose mind glows with sentiments lighted up at their sacred flame—the man whose heart distends with benevolence to all the human race—he "who can soar above this little scene of things"—can he descend to mind the paltry concerns about which the terræfilial race fret, and fume, and vex themselves! O how the glorious triumph swells my heart! I forget that I am a poor, insignificant devil, unnoticed and unknown, stalking up and down fairs and markets, when I happen to be in them, reading a page or two of Mankind, and "catching the manners living as they rise," whilst the men of business jostle me on every side, as an idle incumbrance in their way.—But I dare say I have by this time tired your patience; so I shall conclude with begging you to give Mrs. Murdoch—not my compliments, for that is a mere commonplace story; but my warmest, kindest wishes for her welfare; and accept of the same for yourself, from, dear Sir, yours.—R. B.

[1] The last shift alluded to here must be the condition of an itinerant beggar.

> The last o't, the warst o't,
> Is only but to beg.

See stanza third, "Epistle to Davie," vol. i. p. 240.

TO MR. JAMES BURNESS,

WRITER, MONTROSE.[4]

LOCHLEA, 21st June, 1783.

DEAR SIR,

My father received your favour of the 10th current, and as he has been for some months

[2] Not for to hide it in a hedge,
Nor for a train-attendant,
But for the glorious privilege
Of bein... dependent.
—*Epistle to a Young Friend.*

[3] Of this sickly, sentimental work, Burns tells us he wore out two copies by carrying in his pocket!

[4] "The gentleman to whom this letter is addressed (the son of an elder brother of my father's), when he was very young, lost his father, and having discovered

very poorly in health, and is in his own opinion (and, indeed, in almost every body's else) in a dying condition, he has only, with great difficulty, wrote a few farewell lines to each of his brothers-in-law. For this melancholy reason, I now hold the pen for him to thank you for your kind letter, and to assure you, Sir, that it shall not be my fault if my father's correspondence in the north die with him. My brother writes to John Caird,[1] and to him I must refer you for the news of our family.

I shall only trouble you with a few particulars relative to the present wretched state of this country. Our markets are exceedingly high; oatmeal, 17*d.* and 18*d.* per peck, and not to be got even at that price. We have indeed been pretty well supplied with quantities of white peas from England and elsewhere, but that resource is likely to fail us, and what will become of us then, particularly the very poorest sort, Heaven only knows. This country, till of late, was flourishing incredibly in the manufacture of silk, lawn, and carpet-weaving; and we are still carrying on a good deal in that way, but much reduced from what it was. We had also a fine trade in the shoe way, but now entirely ruined, and hundreds driven to a starving condition on account of it. Farming is also at a very low ebb with us. Our lands, generally speaking, are mountainous and barren; and our landholders, full of ideas of farming gathered from the English and the Lothians, and other rich soils in Scotland, make no allowance for the odds of the quality of land, and consequently stretch us much beyond what in the event we will be found able to pay.[2] We are also much at a loss for want of proper methods in our improvements of farming. Necessity compels us to leave our old schemes, and few of us have opportunities of being well informed in new ones. In short, my dear Sir, since the unfortunate beginning of this American war, and its as unfortunate conclusion, this country has been, and still is, decaying very fast. Even in higher life, a couple of our Ayrshire noblemen, and the major part of our knights and squires, are all insolvent. A miserable job of a Douglas, Heron, and Co.'s bank, which no doubt you have heard of, has undone numbers of them; and imitating English and French, and other foreign luxuries and fopperies, has ruined as many more. There is a great trade of smuggling carried on along our coasts, which, however destructive to the interests of the kingdom at large, certainly enriches this corner of it, but too often at the expense of our morals. However, it enables individuals to make, at least for a time, a splendid appearance: but Fortune, as is usual with her when she is uncommonly lavish of her favours, is generally even with them at the last; and happy were it for numbers of them if she would leave them no worse than when she found them.

My mother sends you a small present of a cheese; 'tis but a very little one, as our last year's stock is sold off; but if you could fix on any correspondent in Edinburgh or Glasgow, we would send you a proper one in the season. Mrs. Black promises to take the cheese under her care so far, and then to send it to you by the Stirling carrier.

I shall conclude this long letter with assuring you that I shall be very happy to hear from you, or any of our friends in your country, when opportunity serves.

My father sends you, probably for the last time in this world, his warmest wishes for your welfare and happiness; and my mother and the rest of the family desire to enclose

in his father's repositories some of my father's letters, he requested that the correspondence might be renewed. My father continued till the last year of his life to correspond with his nephew, and it was afterwards kept up by my brother. Extracts from some of my brother's letters to his cousin, are introduced in this edition for the purpose of exhibiting the Poet before he had attracted the notice of the public, and in his domestic family relations afterwards."—GILBERT BURNS.

[1] John Caird, husband of Elspet, a sister of the poet's father.

[2] The poet here figures as the farmer. That his opinions, as an agriculturist, were valued, may be gathered from the following note attached to a *General View of the Agriculture of the County of Ayr*, by Colone Fullarton, of Fullarton, drawn up for the consideration of the Board of Agriculture and Internal Improvement, and published at Edinburgh, 1793:—"In order to prevent the danger arising from horned cattle in studs and straw yards, the best mode is to cut out the budding knob, or root of the horn, while the calf is very young. This was suggested to me by Mr. Robert Burns, whose general talents are no less conspicuous, than the poetic powers which have done so much honour to the county where he was born." We rather think this suggestion has never found much favour.

their kind compliments to you, Mrs. Burness, and the rest of your family, along with,

Dear Sir, your affectionate Cousin,

ROBT. BURNESS.

TO MR. JAMES BURNESS, MONTROSE.

LOCHLEA, 17th Feb. 1784.

DEAR COUSIN,

I would have returned you my thanks for your kind favour of the 13th of December sooner, had it not been that I waited to give you an account of that melancholy event, which, for some time past, we have from day to day expected.

On the 13th current I lost the best of fathers. Though, to be sure, we have had long warning of the impending stroke; still the feelings of nature claim their part, and I cannot recollect the tender endearments and parental lessons of the best of friends and ablest of instructors, without feeling what perhaps the calmer dictates of reason would partly condemn.

I hope my father's friends in your country will not let their connection in this place die with him. For my part I shall ever with pleasure—with pride, acknowledge my connection with those who were allied by the ties of blood and friendship to a man whose memory I shall ever honour and revere.

I expect, therefore, my dear Sir, you will not neglect any opportunity of letting me hear from you, which will very much oblige,

My dear Cousin, yours sincerely,

ROBERT BURNESS.

TO MR. JAMES BURNESS, MONTROSE.

MOSSGIEL, 3d August, 1784.

MY DEAR SIR,

I ought in gratitude to have acknowledged the receipt of your last kind letter before this time; but, without troubling you with any apology, I shall proceed to inform you that our family are all in good health at present, and we were very happy with the unexpected favour of John Caird's company for nearly two weeks, and I must say it of him, that he is one of the most agreeable, facetious, warm-hearted lads I was ever acquainted with.

We have been surprised with one of the most extraordinary phenomena in the moral world which, I daresay, has happened in the course of this last century. We have had a party of Presbytery Relief,[1] as they call themselves, for some time in this country. A pretty thriving society of them has been in the burgh of Irvine for some years past, till about two years ago a Mrs. Buchan from Glasgow came among them, and began to spread some fanatical notions of religion among them, and, in a short time, made many converts among them; and, among others, their preacher, Mr. Whyte, who, upon that account, has been suspended and formally deposed by his brethren.[2] He continued, however, to preach in private to his party, and was supported, both he, and their spiritual mother, as they affect to call old Buchan, by the contributions of the rest, several of whom were in good circumstances; till, in spring last, the populace rose and mobbed the old leader, Buchan, and put her out of the town; on which, all her followers voluntarily quitted the place likewise, and with such precipitation, that many of them never shut their doors behind them; one left a washing on the green, another a cow bellowing at the crib without food, or any body to mind her, and after several stages, they are fixed at present in the neighbourhood of Dumfries. Their tenets are a strange jumble of enthusiastic jargon; among other she pretends to give them the Holy Ghost by breathing on them, which she does with postures and practices that are scandalously indecent; they have likewise disposed of all their effects, and hold a community of goods, and live nearly an idle life, carrying on a great farce of pretended devotion in barns and woods, where they lodge and lie all together, and hold like-

[1] The Relief Church was a body of Presbyterian dissenters from the Established Church of Scotland that formed themselves into a separate sect about the middle of last century. In 1847 they combined with other bodies to form the United Presbyterian Church.

[2] Mrs. Buchan was a native of Banffshire, and the wife of a tradesman employed at a Glasgow pottery. The nature of her fanaticism much resembled that of the more modern prophetess, Joanna Southcote. The poor insane creature believed she was to bring forth a Messiah; and after her death, her followers, like the Southcotians, cherished for years the notion that she would appear again.

wise a community of women, as it is another of their tenets that they can commit no moral sin. I am personally acquainted with most of them, and I can assure you the above mentioned are facts.

This, my dear Sir, is one of the many instances of the folly of leaving the guidance of sound reason and common sense in matters of religion. Whenever we neglect or despise these sacred monitors, the whimsical notions of a perturbated brain are taken for the immediate influences of the Deity, and the wildest fanaticism, and the most inconsistent absurdities, will meet with abettors and converts. Nay, I have often thought, that the more out-of-the-way and ridiculous the fancies are, if once they are sanctified under the sacred name of religion, the unhappy mistaken votaries are the more firmly glued to them.

I expect to hear from you soon, and I beg you will remember me to all friends, and believe me to be,

My dear Sir, your affectionate Cousin,

ROBERT BURNESS.

Direct to me at Mossgiel, parish of Mauchline, near Kilmarnock.

TO MR. THOMAS ORR,[1]

PARK, NEAR KIRKOSWALD.

MOSGAVIL,[2] 11th November, 1784.

DEAR THOMAS,

I am much obliged to you for your last letter, though I assure you the contents of it gave me no manner of concern. I am presently so cursedly taken in with an affair of gallantry, that I am very glad Peggy[3] is off my hand, as I am at present embarrassed enough without her.[4] I don't choose to enter into particulars in writing, but never was a poor rakish rascal in a more pitiful taking. I should be glad to see you to tell you the affair, meanwhile I am your friend,

ROBERT BURNESS.

[1] Thomas Orr was an old companion of the poet's, the friendship dating from his Kirkoswald schooldays in the autumn of 1775. He occasionally visited the Burnses at Lochlea in the harvest time to assist them in shearing.

[2] Mossgiel, Mossgavil, Mossgaville are all different spellings (the last the most correct) of the farm now occupied by Burns.

[3] Peggy Thomson, the fair fillette whose charms put an end to the poet's studies at Kirkoswald. See Life.

[4] This embarrassment was caused by the birth of an illegitimate child by Elizabeth Paton, formerly a servant with his father at Lochlea.

TO MR. JOHN RICHMOND,

EDINBURGH.[5]

MOSSGIEL, Feb. 17, 1786.

MY DEAR SIR,

I have not time at present to upbraid you for your silence and neglect; I shall only say I received yours with great pleasure. I have inclosed you a piece of rhyming ware for your perusal. I have been very busy with the Muses since I saw you, and have composed, among several others, the "Ordination," a poem on Mr. M'Kinlay's being called to Kilmarnock; "Scotch Drink," a poem; the "Cotter's Saturday Night;" an "Address to the Devil," &c. I have likewise completed my poem on the "Dogs," but have not shown it to the world. My chief patron now is Mr. Aiken in Ayr, who is pleased to express great approbation of my works. Be so good as send me Fergusson, by Connel,[6] and I will remit you the money. I have no news to acquaint you with about Mauchline; they are just going on in the old way. I have some very important news with respect to myself, not the most agreeable—news that I am sure you cannot guess, but I shall give you the particulars another time.[7] I am extremely happy with Smith,[8] he is the only friend I have now in Mauchline. I can scarcely forgive your long neglect of me, and I beg you will let me hear from you regularly by Connel. If you would act your part as a friend, I am sure neither good nor bad fortune should estrange or alter me. Excuse haste, as I got yours but yesterday. I am, my dear Sir, yours,

ROBERT BURNESS.

[5] An early friend of Burns, formerly a lawyer's apprentice in the office of Gavin Hamilton, and at this time pursuing his legal studies in Edinburgh. The poet lodged with him on his first visit to the capital.

[6] The Mauchline carrier.

[7] About this time the result of the intercourse between Burns and Jean Armour became public.

[8] James Smith, shopkeeper in Mauchline See next letter with note.

TO MR. JAMES SMITH,[1]

MAUCHLINE.

. . . Against two things I am as fixed as fate—staying at home; and owning her conjugally. The first, by Heaven, I will not do! —the last, by Hell, I will never do! A good God bless you and make you happy, up to the warmest weeping wish of parting friendship. . . .

If you see Jean tell her I will meet her, so help me God, in my hour of need.[2]

R. B.

TO MR. JOHN KENNEDY.[3]

MOSSGIEL, 3d March, 1786.

SIR,

I have done myself the pleasure of complying with your request in sending you my Cottager. If you have a leisure minute, I should be glad you would copy it and return me either the original or the transcript, as I have not a copy of it by me, and I have a friend who wishes to see it.

Now, Kennedy, if foot or horse
E'er bring you in by Mauchline corse, &c.—

[See the complete poetical part of the epistle among the Poems, vol. ii. p. 123.]

TO MR. ROBERT MUIR,

KILMARNOCK.[4]

MOSSGIEL, 20th March, 1786.

DEAR SIR,

I am heartily sorry I had not the pleasure of seeing you as you returned through Mauchline; but as I was engaged, I could not be in town before the evening.

I here inclose you my "Scotch Drink," and "may the ——— follow with a blessing for your edification." I hope, sometime before we hear the gowk,[5] to have the pleasure of seeing you at Kilmarnock, when I intend we shall have a gill between us, in a mutchkin-stoup; which will be a great comfort and consolation to, dear Sir, your humble servant,

ROBERT BURNESS.

TO MR. AIKEN.[6]

MOSSGIEL, 3d April, 1786.

DEAR SIR,

I received your kind letter with double pleasure, on account of the second flattering instance of Mrs. C.'s[7] notice and approbation. I assure you I

Turn out the brunt side o' my shin,

as the famous Ramsay, of jingling memory, says, at such a patroness. Present her my most grateful acknowledgments in your very best manner of telling truth. I have inscribed the following stanza on the blank leaf of Miss [Hannah] More's work.

Thou flatt'ring mark of friendship kind, &c.

[See Poems, vol. ii. p. 126.]

My proposals for publishing I am just going to send to the press. I expect to hear from you by the first opportunity.

I am, ever dear Sir, yours,

ROBERT BURNESS.[8]

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[1] This is the same James Smith, shopkeeper in Mauchline, to whom one of the poet's finest poetical epistles is addressed. See vol. ii. p. 105.

[2] This painful episode in the bard's history is sufficiently treated of in the Life. Lockhart is the only authority for this fragment.

[3] John Kennedy, a friend of Gavin Hamilton, and through him of the poet. He was at this time factor or agent for the Earl of Dumfries at Dumfries House, in Burns's neighbourhood. He was Burns's senior by two years. He had requested a perusal of the "Cotter's Saturday Night."

[4] Robert Muir, wine merchant, Kilmarnock, and proprietor of a small encumbered estate called Loanfoot, was one of the poet's acquaintances, who exerted himself in obtaining subscriptions for his works. He stands as subscriber for forty copies in the Edinburgh edition. "He was one of those friends Robert's poetry had procured him, and one who was dear to his heart. This gentleman had no very great fortune, or long line of dignified ancestry; but what Robert says of Captain Matthew Henderson might be said of him with great propriety:—'He held the patent of his honours from Almighty God.' Nature had indeed marked him a gentleman in the most legible characters."—GILBERT BURNS.

[5] The cuckoo.

[6] Mr. Robert Aiken, the gentleman to whom the "Cotter's Saturday Night" is addressed, an early friend and patron of the poet. See Life, vol. i. p. 54.

[7] Probably Mrs. Cunningham, wife of Sir William Cunningham, of Robertland, who, in the words of Gilbert Burns, "paid a very flattering attention, and showed a great deal of friendship for the poet."

[8] This is the latest letter extant, with the exception of one to his cousin, James Burness, in which the poet signs his name as above.

TO [JOHN BALLANTINE, OF AYR.][1]

[April, 1786.]

HONOURED SIR,

My proposals[2] came to hand last night, and, knowing that you would wish to have it in your power to do me a service as early as any body, I inclose you a half sheet of them. I must consult you, first opportunity, on the propriety of sending my quondam friend, Mr. Aiken, a copy. If he is now reconciled to my character as an honest man, I will do it with all my soul; but I would not be beholden to the noblest being ever God created, if he imagined me to be a rascal. Apropos, old Mr. Armour prevailed with him to mutilate that unlucky paper yesterday. Would you believe it? though I had not a hope, nor even a wish, to make her mine after her conduct; yet, when he told me the names were all out of the paper, my heart died within me, and he cut my veins with the news. Perdition seize her falsehood!

ROBT. BURNS.

TO MR. M'WHINNIE, WRITER, AYR.

MOSSGIEL, 17th April, 1786.

It is injuring some hearts, those hearts that elegantly bear the impression of the good Creator, to say to them you give them the trouble of obliging a friend; for this reason, I only tell you that I gratify my own feeling in requesting your friendly offices with respect to the inclosed,[3] because I know it will gratify yours to assist me in it to the utmost of your power.

I have sent you four copies, as I have no less than eight dozen, which is a great deal more than I shall ever need.

Be sure to remember a poor poet militant in your prayers. He looks forward with fear and trembling to that, to him, important moment which stamps the die with—with—with, perhaps, the eternal disgrace of,

My dear Sir, your humble,
afflicted, tormented,
ROBT. BURNS.

TO MR. JOHN KENNEDY.

MOSSGIEL, 20th April, 1786.

SIR,

By some neglect in Mr. Hamilton, I did not hear of your kind request for a subscription paper till this day. I will not attempt any acknowledgment for this, nor the manner in which I see your name in Mr. Hamilton's subscription list. Allow me only to say, Sir, I feel the weight of the debt.

I have here, likewise, inclosed a small piece, the very latest of my productions.[4] I am a good deal pleased with some sentiments myself as they are just the native querulous feelings of a heart, which, as the elegantly melting Gray says, "melancholy has marked for her own."

Our race comes on apace—that much expected scene of revelry and mirth—but to me it brings no joy equal to that meeting with which your last flattered the expectation of,

Sir, your indebted humble servant,
ROBT. BURNS.

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[1] This letter, which has neither name nor date, and which seems to have been a mere scroll written in the irritation of the moment, and probably under a misapprehension as regards Mr. Aiken's feelings, was first given to the world by Allan Cunningham, who, without known authority, names Ballantine as the addressee. As to this gentleman see Life, p. 54. The "her" referred to in the letter is, of course, Jean Armour.

[2] This intimation to the public ran as follows: "Proposals for publishing by Subscription, SCOTTISH POEMS by Robert Burns. The work to be elegantly printed in one volume octavo. Price, stitched, Three Shillings. As the Author has not the most distant mercenary view in publishing, as soon as so many Subscribers appear as will defray the necessary expense, the work will be sent to the press.

Set out the brunt side of your shin,
For pride in poets is nae sin;
Glory's the prize for which they rin,
And Fame's their joe;
And wha blaws best his horn shall win,
And wherefore no?
ALLAN RAMSAY."

[3] A prospectus of his poems. Mr. M'Whinnie subscribed himself, and induced others to do so.

[4] This was the "Mountain Daisy;" in the original MS. it is entitled the "Gowan."

TO JOHN ARNOT,

OF DALQUHATSWOOD, ESQ.[1]

INCLOSING A SUBSCRIPTION-BILL FOR MY FIRST EDITION, WHICH WAS PRINTED AT KILMARNOCK.

[MOSSGIEL, April, 1786.]

SIR,

I have long wished for some kind of claim to the honour of your acquaintance, and since it is out of my power to make that claim by the least service of mine to you, I shall do it by asking a friendly office of you to me.—I should be much hurt, Sir, if any one should view my poor Parnassian Pegasus in the light of a spur-galled hack, and think that I wish to make a shilling or two by him.

> It may do—maun do, Sir, wi' them wha
> Maun please the great folk for a wame-fou
> For me sae laigh I needna bow,
> For, Lord be thankit! I can plough:
> And when I downa yoke a naig,
> Then, Lord be thankit! I can beg.[2]

[1] It seems to us strange that Burns should have written a letter of such questionable taste to a stranger, and still more strange that he preserved a copy of it, and was at the trouble, several years afterwards, of copying it into the collection of letters he transcribed for Captain Riddell of Glenriddell. He superscribed the copy with the following note:—"This was addressed to one of the most accomplished of the sons of men that I ever met with—John Arnot of Dalquhatswood, in Ayrshire. Alas! had he been equally prudent. It is a damning circumstance in human life, that prudence, insular and alone, without another virtue will conduct a man to the most envied eminence in life, while having every other quality and wanting that one, which at best is itself but a half virtue, will not save a man from the world's contempt and real misery—perhaps perdition.

"The story of the letter was this. I had got deeply in love with a young fair one, of which proofs were every day arising more and more to view. I would gladly have covered my *Inamorata* from the darts of calumny with the conjugal shield—nay, I had actually made up some sort of wedlock; but I was at that time deep in the guilt of being unfortunate, for which good and lawful objection the lady's friends broke all our measures and drove me *au désespoir*." It need hardly be stated that the *Inamorata* mentioned above was Jean Armour. Towards the end of this strange production he speaks of being in the position of a widower on the outlook for a second wife. By this time Highland Mary had taken the place of Jean in his affections, at least temporarily. This letter was first published in 1878 in Mr. W. Scott Douglas's Edinburgh edition. The piece bears traces of Burns's study of Sterne.

[2] From the "Dedication to Gavin Hamilton," vol. ii. p. 155.

You will then, I hope Sir, forgive my troubling you with the inclosed, and spare a poor heart-crushed devil a world of apologies—a business he is unfit for at any time; but at present, widowed as he is of every woman-giving comfort, he is utterly incapable of. Sad and grievous of late, Sir, has been my tribulation, and many and piercing my sorrows; and had it not been for the loss the world would have sustained in losing so great a poet, I had, ere now, done as a much wiser man, the famous Achitophel of long-headed memory did before me, when "he went home and set his house in order." I have lost, Sir, that dearest earthly treasure, that greatest blessing here below, that last, best gift which completed Adam's happiness in the garden of bliss, I have lost—I have lost—my trembling hand refuses its office, the frighted ink recoils up the quill—Tell it not in Gath—I have lost—a—a—a wife!

> Fairest of God's creation, last and best!
> *Now art thou lost.*

You have doubtless, Sir, heard my story, heard it with all its exaggerations; but as my actions and my motives for action are peculiarly like myself, and that is peculiarly like nobody else, I shall just beg a leisure moment and a spare tear of you, until I tell my own story my own way.

I have been all my life, Sir, one of the rueful-looking, long-visaged sons of Disappointment. A damned star has always kept my zenith, and shed its baleful influence in that emphatic curse of the prophet—"And behold whatsoever he doth, it shall not prosper!" I rarely hit where I aim; and if I want anything, I am almost sure never to find it where I seek it. For instance, if my penknife is needed, I pull out twenty things—a plough-wedge, a horse-nail, an old letter, or a tattered rhyme, in short everything but my penknife, and that, at last, after a painful, fruitless search, will be found in the unsuspected corner of an unsuspected pocket, as if on purpose thrust out of the way. Still, Sir, I had long had a wishing eye to that inestimable blessing, a wife. My mouth watered deliciously to see a young fellow, after a few idle common-place stories from a gentleman in black, strip and go to bed with a young girl, and no one durst say black was his eye; while I, for just doing

the same thing, only wanting that ceremony, am made a Sunday's laughing-stock and abused like a pick-pocket. I was well aware though, that if my ill-starred fortune got the least hint of my connubial wish, my schemes would go to nothing. To prevent this I determined to take my measures with such thought and forethought, such a caution and precaution, that all the malignant planets in the Hemisphere should be unable to blight my designs. Not content with, to use the words of the celebrated Westminster divines, "The outward and ordinary means," I left no stone unturned, sounded every unfathomed depth, stopped up every hole and bore of an objection; but, how shall I tell it? notwithstanding all this turning of stones, stopping of bores, &c.—whilst I, with secret pleasure, marked my project swelling to the proper crisis, and was singing *Te Deum* in my own fancy; or, to change the metaphor, whilst I was vigorously pressing on the siege; had carried the counterscarp and made a practicable breach; nay, having mastered the covered way, I had found means to slip a choice detachment into the very citadel; while I had nothing less in view than displaying my victorious banners on the top of the walls—Heaven and Earth, must I "remember?" my damned star wheeled about to the zenith, by whose baleful rays Fortune took the alarm, and pouring in her forces on all quarters, front, flank and rear, I was utterly routed, my baggage lost, my military chest in the hands of the enemy; and your poor devil of a humble servant, commander-in-chief forsooth, was obliged to scamper away, without either arms or honours of war, except his bare bayonet and cartridge-pouch; nor in all probability had he escaped even with them had he not made a shift to hide them under the lap of his military cloak.

In short, Pharaoh at the Red Sea, Darius at Arbela, Pompey at Pharsalia, Edward at Bannockburn, Charles at Pultaway, Burgoyne at Saratoga, no prince, potentate or commander of ancient or modern unfortunate memory ever got a more shameful or more total defeat—

> O horrible! O horrible! most horrible!

How I bore this can only be conceived. All powers of recital labour far, far behind. There is a pretty large portion of Bedlam in the composition of a poet at any time; but on this occasion I was nine parts and nine-tenths, out of ten, stark, staring mad. At first I was fixed in stuporific insensibility, silent, sullen, staring like Lot's wife besaltified in the plains of Gomorha. But my second paroxysm chiefly beggars description. The rifted northern ocean when returning suns dissolve the chains of winter, and loosening precipices of long accumulated ice tempest with hideous crash the foaming deep—images like these may give some faint shadow of what was the situation of my bosom. My chained faculties broke loose, my maddening passions, roused to tenfold fury, bore over their banks with impetuous, resistless force, carrying every check and principle before them. Council was an unheeded call to the passing hurricane, Reason, a screaming elk in the vortex of Moskoestrom; and Religion, a feebly struggling beaver down the roarings of Niagara. I reprobated the first moment of my existence; execrated Adam's folly-infatuated wish for that goodly looking, but poison-breathing gift which had ruined him and undone me; and called on the womb of uncreated night to close over me and all my sorrows.

A storm naturally overblows itself. My spent passions gradually sank into a lurid calm; and by degrees I have subsided into the time-settled sorrow of the sable widower, who, wiping away the decent tear, lifts up his grief-worn eye to look—for another wife.—

> Such is the state of man; to-day he buds
> His tender leaves of hope; to-morrow blossoms,
> And bears his blushing honours thick upon him;
> The third day comes a frost, a killing frost,
> And nips his root, and then he falls as I do.[1]

Such, sir, has been the fatal era of my life—"And it came to pass that when I looked for sweet, behold bitter; and for light, behold darkness."

But this is not all.—Already the holy beagles, the houghmagandie pack, begin to snuff the scent, and I expect every moment to see them cast off, and hear them after me in full cry; but as I am an old fox I shall give them dodging and doubling for it, and by and by,

[1] The bard quotes Shakespeare a little at random here, which may be pardoned under the circumstances. See *Henry VIII.* iii. 2.

I intend to earth among the mountains of Jamaica.

I am so struck, on a review, with the impertinent length of this letter, that I shall not increase it with one word of apology; but abruptly conclude with assuring you, that I am, Sir, Your and Misery's most humble servant,

ROBT. BURNS.

TO MR. JOHN KENNEDY.

MOSSGIEL, 17th May, 1786.

DEAR SIR,

I have sent you the above hasty copy as I promised.[1] In about three or four weeks I shall probably set the press agoing. I am much hurried at present, otherwise your diligence, so very friendly in my subscription should have a more lengthened acknowledgment from, dear Sir, your obliged servant,

ROBT. BURNS.

TO MR. DAVID BRICE.[2]

MOSSGIEL, JUNE 12, 1786.

DEAR BRICE,

I received your message by G. Paterson, and as I am not very throng at present, I just write to let you know that there is such a worthless, rhyming reprobate, as your humble servant, still in the land of the living, though I can scarcely say, in the place of hope. I have no news to tell you that will give me any pleasure to mention, or you to hear.

Poor ill-advised, ungrateful Armour came home on Friday last.[3] You have heard all the particulars of that affair, and a black affair it is. What she thinks of her conduct now I don't know; one thing I do know—she has made me completely miserable. Never man loved, or rather adored a woman more than I did her; and to confess the truth between you and me, I do still love her to distraction after all, although I won't tell her so if I were to see her, which I don't want to do. My poor dear unfortunate Jean! how happy have I been in thy arms! It is not the losing her that makes me so unhappy, but for her sake I feel most severely: I foresee she is in the road to, I am afraid, eternal ruin.

May Almighty God forgive her ingratitude and perjury to me, as I from my very soul forgive her; and may his grace be with her and bless her in all her future life! I can have no nearer idea of the place of eternal punishment than what I have felt in my own breast on her account. I have tried often to forget her; I have run into all kinds of dissipation and riots, mason-meetings, drinking-matches, and other mischief, to drive her out of my head, but all in vain. And now for a grand cure; the ship is on her way home that is to take me out to Jamaica; and then, farewell, dear old Scotland; and farewell, dear ungrateful Jean! for never, never will I see you more.

You will have heard that I am going to commence poet in print; and to-morrow my works go to the press. I expect it will be a volume of about two hundred pages—it is just the last foolish action I intend to do; and then turn a wise man as fast as possible.

Believe me to be, dear Brice,
Your friend and well-wisher,
R. B.

TO MR. JAMES BURNESS, WRITER, MONTROSE.

MOSSGIEL, NEAR MAUCHLINE, July 5th, 1786.

MY DEAR SIR,

I wrote you about three half twelvemonths ago by post, and I wrote you about a year ago by a private hand, and I have not had the least return from you. I have just half a minute to write you by an Aberdeen gentleman of my acquaintance who promises to wait upon you with this on his arrival or soon after. I intend to send you a letter accompanied with a singular curiosity in about five or six weeks hence.[4] I shall then write you more at large; meanwhile you are just to look on this as a

[1] The "Epistle to John Rankine" (vol. i. p. 224), it is believed, was the poem alluded to in this hurried note.

[2] Shoemaker in Glasgow.

[3] In May, 1786, Jean Armour went to reside with a relation of her mother's in Paisley. See the note to the poem, "O thou, pale orb," vol. ii. p. 137.

[4] A copy of the first edition of the poems, then passing through the press.

memento me. I hope all friends are well.—I am ever, my dear Sir, your affectionate Cousin,

ROBT. BURNESS.[1]

TO JOHN RICHMOND, EDINBURGH.

MOSSGIEL, 9th July, 1786.

With the sincerest grief I read your letter. You are truly a son of misfortune. I shall be extremely anxious to hear from you how your health goes on; if it is any way re-establishing, or if Leith promises well: in short, how you feel in the inner man.

No news worth any thing; only godly Bryan was in the inquisition yesterday, and half the countryside as witnesses against him. He still stands out steady and denying: but proof was led yesternight of circumstances highly suspicious; almost *de facto;* one of the servant girls made faith that she upon a time rashly entered into the house, to speak, in your cant, "in the hour of cause."

I have waited on Armour since her return home; not from the least view of reconciliation, but merely to ask for her health, and to you I will confess it, from a foolish hankering fondness, very ill placed indeed. The mother forbade me the house, nor did Jean show that penitence that might have been expected. However, the priest, I am informed, will give me a certificate as a single man, if I comply with the rules of the church, which for that very reason I intend to do.

I am going to put on sackcloth and ashes this day. I am indulged so far as to appear in my own seat. *Peccavi, pater, miserere mei.* My book will be ready in a fortnight. If you have any subscribers, return them by Connell. The Lord stand with the righteous; amen, amen.

R. B.

TO MR. DAVID BRICE, SHOEMAKER, GLASGOW.

MOSSGIEL, 17th July, 1786.

I have been so throng printing my Poems, that I could scarcely find as much time as to write to you. Poor Armour is come back again to Mauchline, and I went to call for her, and her mother forbade me the house, nor did she herself express much sorrow for what she has done. I have already appeared publicly in church, and was indulged in the liberty of standing in my own seat. I do this to get a certificate as a bachelor, which Mr. Auld has promised me. I am now fixed to go for the West Indies in October. Jean and her friends insisted much that she should stand along with me in the kirk, but the minister would not allow it, which bred a great trouble I assure you, and I am blamed as the cause of it, though I am sure I am innocent; but I am very much pleased, for all that, not to have had her company.[2] I have no news to tell you that I remember. I am really happy to hear of your welfare, and that you are so well in Glasgow. I must certainly see you before I leave the country. I shall expect to hear from you soon, and am, dear Brice, yours,—

R. B

TO MR. JOHN RICHMOND.

OLD ROME FOREST,[3] 30th July, 1786.

MY DEAR RICHMOND,

My hour is now come—you and I will never meet in Britain more. I have orders, within three weeks at farthest, to repair aboard the Nancy, Captain Smith, from Clyde, to Jamaica, and to call at Antigua. This, except to our friend Smith, whom God long preserve, is a secret about Mauchline. Would you believe it? Armour has got a warrant to throw me in jail till I find security for an enormous sum.[4] This they keep an entire secret, but I got it by a channel they little dream of; and I am wandering from one friend's house to another, and, like a true son of the gospel,

[1] This seems to have been the last occasion on which the poet spelt his name so.

[2] As to Burns's and Jean's penitential appearances in church, see note, vol. i. p. 46. Why her friends should have insisted on her "standing along" with him is not to us clear.

[3] This is a place near Kilmarnock, where resided Mrs. Allan, an aunt of the poet, to whose house his travelling chest had been transferred on its way to Greenock.

[4] Armour's object in obtaining the warrant was not to throw the distracted poet into jail, but to frighten him out of the country.

"have no where to lay my head." I know you will pour an execration on her head, but spare the poor, ill-advised girl, for my sake; though may all the furies that rend the injured, enraged lover's bosom, await her mother until her latest hour! I write in a moment of rage, reflecting on my miserable situation —exiled, abandoned, forlorn. I can write no more—let me hear from you by the return of coach. I will write you ere I go. I am, dear Sir, yours, here and hereafter,

R. B.

TO MR. JOHN KENNEDY.

KILMARNOCK, August, 1786

MY DEAR SIR,

Your truly facetious epistle of the 3rd instant gave me much entertainment. I was only sorry I had not the pleasure of seeing you as I passed your way, but we shall bring up all our lee-way on Wednesday, the 16th current, when I hope to have it in my power to call on you, and take a kind, very probably a last adieu, before I go for Jamaica, and I expect orders to repair to Greenock every day.—I have at last made my public appearance, and am solemnly inaugurated into the numerous class. Could I have got a carrier, you should have had a score of vouchers for my authorship; but now you have them, let them speak for themselves,—

Farewell, dear friend! may guid luck hit you,
And, 'mang her favourites admit you!
If e'er Detraction shore to smit you,
May nane believe him!
And ony deil that thinks to get you,
Good Lord deceive him.

R. B.

TO JOHN LOGAN, ESQ.,

OF LAIGHT.

KILMARNOCK, 10th Aug. 1786.

SIR,

I gratefully thank you for your kind offices in promoting my subscription, and still more for your very friendly letter.—The first was doing me a favour, but the last was doing me an honour.—I am in such a bustle at present preparing for my West-India voyage, as I expect a letter every day from the master of the vessel, to repair immediately to Greenock; that I am under a necessity to return you the subscription bills, and trouble you with the quantum of copies till called for, or otherwise transmitted to the gentlemen who have subscribed. Mr. Bruce Campbell is already supplied with two copies, and I here send you twenty copies more. If any of the gentlemen are supplied from any other quarter, 'tis no matter; the copies can be returned.

If orders from Greenock do not hinder, I intend doing myself the honour of waiting on you, Wednesday, the 16th inst.

I am much hurt, Sir, that I must trouble you with the copies; but circumstanced as I am, I know no other way your friends can be supplied.—I have the honour to be, Sir, your much indebted humble servant,

R. B.

TO MONS. JAMES SMITH,

MAUCHLINE.

MOSSGIEL, Monday Morning, 14th Aug. 1786.

MY DEAR SIR,

I went to Dr. Douglas yesterday, fully resolved to take the opportunity of Captain Smith; but I found the Doctor with a Mr. and Mrs. White, both Jamaicans, and they have deranged my plans altogether. They assure him, that to send me from Savannah la Mar to Port Antonio will cost my master, Charles Douglas, upwards of fifty pounds;[1] besides

[1] Respecting this Jamaican engagement Dr. Currie published the following letter addressed to the poet by John Hutchinson, an early acquaintance, then residing in the West Indies:—

"JAMAICA, ST. ANN'S, 14th June, 1787.

I received yours wherein you acquaint me you were engaged with Mr. Douglas, Port Antonio, for three years at thirty pounds stg. a year; and am happy that some unexpected accident intervened to prevent your sailing with the vessel, as I have great reason to think Mr. Douglas's employ would by no means have answered your expectations. I received a copy of your publication, for which I return you my thanks, and it is my own opinion, as well as that of such of my friends as have seen the poems, that they are most excellent in their kind. . . . I can by no means advise you now to think of coming to the West Indies, as, I assure you, there is no encouragement for a man of learning and genius here; and am very confident you can do far better in Great Britain than in Jamaica. . . ."

running the risk of throwing myself into a pleuritic fever in consequence of hard travelling in the sun. On these accounts, he refuses sending me with Smith; but a vessel sails from Greenock the first of September, right for the place of my destination. The captain of her is an intimate friend of Mr. Gavin Hamilton's, and as good a fellow as heart could wish: with him I am destined to go. Where I shall shelter, I know not, but I hope to weather the storm. Perish the drop of blood of mine that fears them! I know their worst, and am prepared to meet it:—

I'll laugh, an' sing, an' shake my leg,
As lang's I dow.

On Thursday morning, if you can muster as much self-denial as to be out of bed about seven o'clock, I shall see you as I ride through to Cumnock. After all, Heaven bless the sex! I feel there is still happiness for me among them:—

O woman, lovely woman! Heaven designed you
To temper man!—we had been brutes without you![1]

R. B.

TO MONS. THOMAS CAMPBELL,

PENCLOE.

[NEW CUMNOCK, 19th Aug. 1786.]

MY DEAR SIR,

I have met with few men in my life whom I more wished to see again than you, and Chance seems industrious to disappoint me of that pleasure. I came here yesterday fully resolved to see you and Mr. Logan at New Cumnock; but a conjuncture of circumstances conspired against me. Having an opportunity of sending you a line, I joyfully embrace it. It is perhaps the last mark of our friendship you can receive from me on this side of the Atlantic.

Farewell! May you be happy up to the wishes of parting friendship!

R. B.

Mr. J. MERRY'S, *Saturday Morn.*

[1] O woman, lovely woman! nature made thee
To temper man! we had been brutes without you.
Otway, Venice Preserved, i. 1.

TO WILLIAM NIVEN,

MERCHANT, MAYBOLE.

CARE OF THOMAS PIPER, SURGEON. TO BE LEFT AT DR. CHARLES'S SHOP, AYR.

MOSSGIEL, 30th August, 1786.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I have been very throng ever since I saw you, and have not got the whole of my promise performed to you; but you know the old proverb, "The break o' a day's no the break o' a bargain." Have patience and I will pay you all.

I thank you with the most heartfelt sincerity for the worthy knot of lads you introduced me to. Never did I meet with so many congenial souls together, without one dissonant jar in the concert. To all and each of them make my friendly compliments, particularly "Spunkie youth, Tammie."[2] Remember me in the most respectful manner to the Bailie and Mrs. Niven,[3] to Mr. Dun,[4] and the two truly worthy old gentlemen I had the honour of being introduced to on Friday; though I am afraid the conduct you forced me on may make them see me in a light I would fondly think I do not deserve.

I will perform the next of my promise soon; in the meantime remember this: never blaze my songs among the million, as I would abhor to hear every prentice mouthing my poor performances in the streets. Every one of my Maybole friends is welcome to a copy if they choose; but I don't wish them to go farther. I mean it as a small token of my respect for them—a respect as sincere as the love of dying saints.—I am ever, my dear William, your obliged,

R. B.[5]

[2] Thomas Piper, assistant to Hugh Logan, M.D., Maybole.

[3] The parents of his correspondent.

[4] Teacher of the parish school, Maybole.

[5] Niven's acquaintance with the poet dated from his school-days at Kirkoswald in 1775. The "merchant" by steady application to business eventually made a considerable amount of money, and became a landowner, and somewhat ridiculously pompous magistrate. He used to assert, we are told, that when he first inspected Burns's Kilmarnock edition, he was greatly mortified to find in the "Epistle to a Young Friend," inscribed to Andrew Aiken, merely a slightly altered version of one addressed to himself

TO MR. JOHN RICHMOND,

EDINBURGH.

MOSSGIEL, Sunday, 3d Sept. 1786.

Wish me luck, dear Richmond! Armour has just brought me a fine boy and girl at one throw. God bless the little dears![1]

Green grow the rashes, O,
Green grow the rashes, O,
A feather bed is no sae saft
As the bosoms o' the lasses, O.

R. B.

TO MR. ROBERT MUIR,

KILMARNOCK.

MOSSGIEL, Friday Morning [Sept. 1786].

MY FRIEND, MY BROTHER,

Warm recollection of an absent friend presses so hard upon my heart, that I send him the prefixed bagatelle [the "Calf"[2]], pleased with the thought that it will greet the man of my bosom, and be a kind of distant language of friendship.

You will have heard that poor Armour has repaid me double. A very fine boy and a girl have awakened a thought and feelings that thrill, some with tender pressure and some with foreboding anguish, through my soul.

The poem was nearly an extemporaneous production, on a wager with Mr. Hamilton, that I would not produce a poem on the subject in a given time.

a year or two previously! As to the merry meeting referred to in the letter, Robert Chambers writes as follows:—

"During August the poet seems to have been busied chiefly in collecting the money due for his poems. . . . In the course of his rounds Burns came to Mayhole, where his Kirkoswald friend Willie had been doing what he could for the sale of the book. The bard was in the highest spirits, for, as he acknowledged, he had never before been in the possession of so much ready cash. Willie assembled a few choice spirits at the King's Arms to do honour to the bard; and they spent a happy night together, Burns being as usual the life and soul of the party. He had, as we know, heavy griefs hanging at his heart; but amongst genial men over a glass of Scotch drink no pain could long molest him. Comic verses flashed from his mouth *al improviso*, to the astonishment of the company, all of whom felt that a paragon of mirthful genius had come among them."

[1] See note, p. 170, vol. ii

[2] See vol. ii. p. 170.

If you think it worth while, read it to Charles [Samson] and Mr. W. Parker, and if they choose a copy of it, it is at their service, as they are men whose friendship I shall be proud to claim, both in this world and that which is to come.

I believe all hopes of staying at home will be abortive; but more of this when, in the latter part of next week, you shall be troubled with a visit from, my dear Sir, your most devoted,

R. B.

TO MR. BURNESS, MONTROSE.

MOSSGIEL, Tuesday noon, Sept. 26, 1786.

MY DEAR SIR,

I this moment receive yours—receive it with the honest hospitable warmth of a friend's welcome. Whatever comes from you wakens always up the better blood about my heart, which your kind little recollections of my parental friend carries as far as it will [illegible]. 'Tis there that man is blest! 'Tis there, my friend, man feels a consciousness of something within him above the trodden clod! The grateful reverence to the hoary (earthly) author of his being—the burning glow when he clasps the woman of his soul to his bosom—the tender yearnings of heart for the little angels to whom he has given existence—these nature has poured in milky streams about the human heart; and the man who never rouses them to action, by the inspiring influences of their proper objects, loses by far the most pleasurable part of his existence.

My departure is uncertain, but I do not think it will be till after harvest. I will be on very short allowance of time indeed, if I do not comply with your friendly invitation. When it will be, I don't know, but if I can make my wish good, I will endeavour to drop you a line some time before. My best compliments to Mrs. Burness; I should be equally mortified should I drop in when she is abroad; but of that I suppose there is little chance.

What I have wrote, Heaven knows; I have not time to review it: so accept of it in the beaten way of friendship. With the ordinary phrase—perhaps rather more than the ordinary sincerity—I am, dear Sir, ever yours,

R. B.

TO MRS. STEWART, OF STAIR.[1]

[Sept. or Oct.], 1786.

MADAM,

The hurry of my preparations for going abroad has hindered me from performing my promises so soon as I intended. I have here sent you a parcel of songs, &c. which never made their appearance except to a friend or two at most. Perhaps some of them may be no great entertainment to you, but of that I am far from being an adequate judge. The song to the tune of "Ettrick Banks,"[2] you will easily see the impropriety of exposing much, even in manuscript. I think, myself, it has some merit; both as a tolerable description of one of nature's sweetest scenes, a July evening, and one of the finest pieces of nature's workmanship, the finest indeed we know anything of—an amiable, beautiful young woman; but I have no common friend to procure me that permission, without which I would not dare to spread the copy.

I am quite aware, Madam, what task the world would assign me in this letter. The obscure bard, when any of the great condescend to take notice of him, should heap the altar with the incense of flattery. Their high ancestry, their own great and god-like qualities and actions, should be recounted, with the most exaggerated description. This, Madam, is a task for which I am altogether unfit. Besides a certain disqualifying pride of heart, I know nothing of your connections in life, and have no access to where your real character is to be found—the company of your compeers; and more, I am afraid that even the most refined adulation is by no means the road to your good opinion.

One feature of your character I shall ever with grateful pleasure remember;—the reception I got when I had the honour of waiting on you at Stair. I am little acquainted with politeness, but I know a good deal of benevolence of temper and goodness of heart. Surely did those in exalted stations know how happy they could make some classes of their inferiors by condescension and affability, they would never stand so high, measuring out with every look the height of their elevation, but condescend as sweetly as did Mrs. Stewart of Stair.
—R. B.

[1] See the note to the song "Flow gently, sweet Afton."

[2] The song addressed to Miss Alexander, "The Lass o' Ballochmyle." See letter to Miss Alexander of 18th Nov.

TO MR. ROBERT AIKEN.

AYRSHIRE [8th October ?], 1786.

SIR,

I was with Wilson, my printer, t'other day, and settled all our by-gone matters between us. After I had paid him all demands, I made him the offer of the second edition, on the hazard of being paid out of the first and readiest, which he declines. By his account, the paper of a thousand copies would cost about twenty-seven pounds, and the printing about fifteen or sixteen; he offers to agree to this for the printing, if I will advance for the paper, but this, you know, is out of my power; so farewell hopes of a second edition 'till I grow richer! an epocha which, I think, will arrive at the payment of the British national debt.[3]

[3] John Wilson, printer of the first edition of Burns's poems, and long supposed to be the subject of the poet's epitaph on "Wee Johny" (see vol. ii. p. 165), was a much-esteemed and respectable citizen of Kilmarnock. The poet himself, in a letter to Robert Muir, calls him "honest John my *quondam* printer." "Burns was at the time on the eve of leaving Scotland, and his circumstances were altogether such as to inspire no great faith in his pecuniary resources: while the odium attached to his works, as immoral and heterodox, were reasons sufficiently weighty to influence any business man of common prudence. We therefore see no reason why Wilson should be blamed, as he has frequently been, for his conduct toward Burns. Wilson was a native of Kilmarnock, where his father kept a small shop, though it might be considered large at that time, for the disposal of general merchandise, in the Fore Street, then the principal thoroughfare. There were two brothers in the bookselling trade, John and Peter. The latter was established in business in Ayr, and the former in Kilmarnock. Though careful and generally secure in their dealings, they were nevertheless active and enterprising in disposition; and to their united efforts the county is indebted for the first newspaper it possessed. The *Ayr Advertiser*, of which they were the original publishers, was begun in 1803. Though the only newspaper in a populous and extensive district, it was but indifferently patronized for some time, and, it is said, the projectors were more than once on the eve of abandoning it altogether. The speculation, however, ultimately became a paying one, insomuch that the Wilsons realized a handsome fortune.

There is scarcely any thing hurts me so much in being disappointed of my second edition as not having it in my power to show my gratitude to Mr. Ballantine by publishing my poem of "The Brigs o' Ayr." I would detest myself as a wretch if I thought I were capable in a very long life of forgetting the honest, warm, and tender delicacy with which he enters into my interests. I am sometimes pleased with myself in my grateful sensations; but I believe, on the whole, I have very little merit in it, as my gratitude is not a virtue, the consequence of reflection; but sheerly the instinctive emotion of a heart too inattentive to allow worldly maxims and views to settle into selfish habit.

I have been feeling all the various rotations and movements within, respecting the excise. There are many things plead strongly against it; the uncertainty of getting soon into business; the consequences of my follies, which may perhaps make it impracticable for me to stay at home; and besides, I have for some time been pining under secret wretchedness, from causes which you pretty well know—the pang of disappointment, the sting of pride, with some wandering stabs of remorse, which never fail to settle on my vitals like vultures, when attention is not called away by the calls of society, or the vagaries of the muse. Even in the hour of social mirth, my gaiety is the madness of an intoxicated criminal under the hands of the executioner. All these reasons urge me to go abroad, and to all these reasons I have only one answer—the feelings of a father. This, in the present mood I am in, overbalances every thing that can be laid in the scale against it.

You may perhaps think it an extravagant fancy, but it is a sentiment which strikes home to my very soul: though sceptical in some points of our current belief, yet, I think, I have every evidence for the reality of a life beyond the stinted bourne of our present existence: if so, then, how should I, in the presence of that tremendous Being, the Author of existence, how should I meet the reproaches of those who stand to me in the dear relation of children, whom I deserted in the smiling innocency of helpless infancy? O, thou great unknown Power!—thou almighty God! who hast lighted up reason in my breast, and blessed me with immortality!—I have frequently wandered from that order and regularity necessary for the perfection of thy works, yet thou hast never left me nor forsaken me!

Since I wrote the foregoing sheet, I have seen something of the storm of mischief thickening over my folly-devoted head. Should you, my friends, my benefactors, be successful in your applications for me, perhaps it may not be in my power in that way, to reap the fruit of your friendly efforts. What I have written in the preceding pages, is the settled tenor of my present resolution; but should inimical circumstances forbid me closing with your kind offer, or enjoying it only threaten to entail farther misery———.

To tell the truth, I have little reason for complaint; as the world, in general, has been kind to me fully up to my deserts. I was, for some time past, fast getting into the pining distrustful snarl of the misanthrope. I saw myself alone, unfit for the struggle of life, shrinking at every rising cloud in the chance-directed atmosphere of fortune, while, all defenceless, I looked about in vain for a cover. It never occurred to me, at least never with the force it deserved, that this world is a busy scene, and man, a creature destined for a progressive struggle: and that, however I might possess a warm heart and inoffensive manners (which last, by the bye, was rather more than I could well boast); still, more than these passive qualities, there was something to be done. When all my school-fellows and youthful compeers (those misguided few excepted who joined, to use a Gentoo phrase, the "hallachores"[2] of the human race) were striking off

On the death of his brother Peter, John Wilson removed from Kilmarnock to Ayr, when the newspaper firm was changed to 'Wilson & Paul;' the Rev. Hamilton Paul having entered into partnership, and conducted the journal for some time. John Wilson died on the 6th May, 1821, leaving a widow but no child[ren]. He was of very small stature, but active and genteel in appearance."—*Ayrshire Contemporaries of Burns.*

[1] So early as this period some of the poet's friends were endeavouring to obtain for him an appointment in the excise.

[2] *Halallkhor.* A name given in India to sweepers or scavengers, who are considered so vile that they cannot be further defiled. Whitworth's *Anglo-Indian Dictionary.* *Gentoo* was formerly used as equivalent to *Hindoo.*

with eager hope and earnest intent, in some one or other of the many paths of busy life, I was "standing idle in the market-place," or only left the chase of the butterfly from flower to flower, to hunt fancy from whim to whim———.

You see, Sir, that if to know one's errors were a probability of mending them, I stand a fair chance; but, according to the reverend Westminster divines, though conviction must precede conversion, it is very far from always implying it.

R. B

TO MISS KENNEDY.[1]

MOSSGIEL, 14th October, 1786.[2]

MADAM,

Permit me to present you with the inclosed song as a small though grateful tribute for the honour of your acquaintance. I have, in these verses, attempted some faint sketches of your portrait in the unembellished simple manner of descriptive TRUTH.—Flattery I leave to your LOVERS, whose exaggerating fancies may make them imagine you still nearer perfection than you really are.

Poets, madam, of all mankind, feel most forcibly the powers of BEAUTY; as, if they are really POETS of nature's making, their feelings must be finer, and their taste more delicate than most of the world. In the cheerful bloom of SPRING, or the pensive mildness of AUTUMN; the grandeur of SUMMER, or the hoary majesty of WINTER; the poet feels a charm unknown to the rest of his species. Even the sight of a fine flower, or the company of a fine woman (by far the finest part of God's works below), have sensations for the poetic heart that the HERD of man are strangers to.—On this last account, madam, I am, as in many other things, indebted to Mr. Hamilton's kindness in introducing me to you. Your lovers may view you with a wish, I look on you with pleasure; their hearts in your presence, may glow with desire, mine rises with admiration.

Should you think this an odd epistle, please recollect the writer is a poet, and you know there is always something *outré* to be allowed for in that character.

That the arrows of misfortune, however they should, as incident to humanity, glance a slight wound, may never reach your *heart*—that the snares of villany never beset you in the road of life—that INNOCENCE may hand you by the path of HONOUR to the dwelling of PEACE, is the sincere wish of him who has the honour to be, &c.

R. B.

TO DR. MACKENZIE,

MAUCHLINE.[3]

Wednesday morning [1st Nov. 1786].

DEAR SIR,

I never spent an afternoon among great folks with half that pleasure as when, in company with you, I had the honour of paying my devoirs to that plain, honest, worthy man, the professor [Dugald Stewart]. I would be delighted to see him perform acts of kindness and friendship, though I were not the object; he does it with such a grace. I think his character, divided into ten parts, stands thus,—four parts Socrates—four parts Nathaniel—and two parts Shakspeare's Brutus.

The foregoing verses were really extempore, but a little corrected since.[4] They may entertain you a little, with the help of that partiality with which you are so good as to favour the performances of, Dear Sir, Your very humble servant,

R. B.

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[1] Miss Margaret Kennedy, the inspirer of the song alluded to in the letter, and beginning, "Young Peggy blooms our bonniest lass." Some hints as to this unfortunate young lady's career are given in a note to that song (p. 51, vol. ii.). The song was put where it stands in ignorance of its true date. It should follow the "Brigs of Ayr."

[2] This letter has been hitherto published without a date, or with a hypothetical one. The date here given, together with the third paragraph, was supplied through the publication of a copy said to have been carefully taken from the original in 1787.

[3] Dr. Mackenzie was a surgeon in Mauchline and early friend of the poet's. He was married to one of the Mauchline belles (see note at page 227, vol. i.), and afterwards practised for many years at Irvine. In his latter days he retired to Edinburgh, where he died, January 11th, 1837.

[4] The verses alluded to were those "On meeting Lord Daer." See vol. ii. p. 185.

TO MRS. DUNLOP OF DUNLOP.[1]

[November], 1786.

MADAM

I am truly sorry I was not at home yesterday, when I was so much honoured with your order for my copies, and incomparably more by the handsome compliments you are pleased to pay my poetic abilities. I am fully persuaded that there is not any class of mankind so feelingly alive to the titillations of applause

[1] Speaking of his letters, Jeffrey says (see *Edinburgh Review* for Jan. 180): "Of his other letters, those addressed to Mrs. Dunlop are, in our opinion, by far the best. He appears, from first to last, to have stood somewhat in awe of this excellent lady, and to have been no less sensible of her sound judgment and strict sense of propriety, than of her steady and generous partiality."

Gilbert Burns, in a letter to Dr. Currie, written near the close of the last century, has given an account of the acquaintance which subsisted for several years between this lady and the bard of Coila. "Of all the friendships," he says, "which Robert acquired in Ayrshire and elsewhere, none seemed more agreeable to him than that of Mrs. Dunlop of Dunlop. . . . Robert was on the point of setting out for Edinburgh, before Mrs. Dunlop had heard of him. About the time of my brother's publishing in Kilmarnock she had been afflicted with a long and severe illness, which had reduced her mind to the most distressing state of depression. In this situation a copy of the printed poems was laid on her table by a friend, and, happening to open on the 'Cotter's Saturday Night,' she read it over with the greatest pleasure and surprise: the poet's description of the simple cottagers operating on her mind like the charm of a powerful exorcist, expelling the demon *ennui*, and restoring her to her wonted inward harmony and satisfaction. Mrs Dunlop sent off an express to Mossgiel, distant fifteen or sixteen miles, with a very obliging letter to my brother, desiring him to send half a dozen copies of his poems, if he had them to spare, and begging he would do her the pleasure of calling at Dunlop House as soon as convenient. This was the beginning of a correspondence which ended only with the poet's life."

Dr. Currie adds: "The friendship of Mrs. Dunlop was of particular value to Burns. . . . Preserving, in the decline of life, the generous affections of youth, her admiration of the poet was now converted into a sincere admiration of the man; which pursued him in after life through good and evil report; in poverty, in sickness, and in sorrow; and which is continued to his infant family, now deprived of their parent."

These paragraphs, together with the numerous letters of the poet to Mrs. Dunlop, place the relation which subsisted between them in a sufficiently clear light. Some particulars more expressly referring to her own personal history may here, however, be added.

Frances Wallace, the only daughter and ultimately the heiress of Sir Thomas Wallace, Baronet, of Craigie, in Ayrshire, was born about the year 1731, and at the age of seventeen became the wife of John Dunlop, Esquire, of Dunlop, in the same county. The family of Craigie is said to have been descended from the father of the immortal defender of Scottish independence. The family of Dunlop is traced back to the year 1260, as the possessors of the estate in Cunningham from which they take their name. Although Mrs. Dunlop brought into her husband's family a very large fortune, together with the mansion of Craigie, beautifully situated on the Ayr, she was content to spend the whole of her married and dowager life, with the exception of occasional visits, in retirement at Dunlop. She there became the mother of five sons and five daughters, all of whom, except one, survived her. Mrs. Dunlop died, May 24, 1815, at the ripe age of eighty-four.

Without the least tincture of the pretension and parade which too often distinguish literary ladies, Mrs. Dunlop was a woman of highly cultivated understanding,—fond of books and extensively acquainted with them, and also disposed to be the kind and zealous friend of their authors. The fact that Burns's letters to her are decidedly more natural and every way pleasing than those addressed to other correspondents, is strikingly indicative of something much above all that is common in Mrs. Dunlop. While she treated him with uniform affability and kindness, there was an unaffected dignity in her whole character, which seems to have at once exercised a salutary restraint over him, and raised his mind, when in communication with hers, to the exercise of its best powers. At the same time, there can be no doubt that the basis of their friendship was laid in their common possession of the generous affections to which Dr. Currie alludes. The mind of Mrs. Dunlop, overflowing with benevolent feelings, delighted in those fine emotions of the Ayrshire poet which found expression in the verses "To a Mouse," the stanzas on a "Winter Night," and the noble poem which first attracted her attention to him. Burns, on the other hand, glowed at finding, in the heiress of ancient family and historic honours, a heart as warm and philanthropic as his own.

After the death of Burns, according to Chambers, Mrs. Dunlop paid a visit to Dr. Currie, in order to consult with him respecting the publication of the poet's works. Dr. Currie had already perused a parcel of her letters to Burns, which he had found amongst the poet's papers; and he was anxious that she would allow of their publication, in connection with those of Burns to herself. But Mrs. Dunlop was extremely averse to all public appearances, and notwithstanding Dr. Currie's assurance of the value of her letters, both on their own account and as rendering Burns's the more intelligible, she refused to allow them to see the light. She concluded her interview with Dr. Currie, we are told, by half jestingly *purchasing back* her letters from him one by one, laying down a letter of Burns for each of her own, till she had obtained the whole. But this account is contradicted by Gilbert Burns. See note to letter to Mrs. Dunlop, p. 253.

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TO MR

DEAR SIR,

I have, along
of Ossian, with
songs. Ossian
but I wish the
Scotch poets, r
conveniently d

[1] Son of the Rev
parish. See Life
Thou dread Pow

as the sons of Parnassus: nor is it easy to conceive how the heart of the poor bard dances with rapture, when those, whose character in life gives them a right to be polite judges, honour him with their approbation. Had you been thoroughly acquainted with me, Madam, you could not have touched my darling heart-chord more sweetly than by noticing my attempts to celebrate your illustrious ancestor, the Saviour of his country.

> Great patriot hero! ill-requited chief!

The first book I met with in my early years, which I perused with pleasure, was, "The life of Hannibal;" the next was, "The History of Sir William Wallace:" for several of my earlier years I had few other authors; and many a solitary hour have I stole out, after the laborious vocations of the day, to shed a tear over their glorious, but unfortunate stories. In those boyish days I remember, in particular, being struck with that part of Wallace's story where these lines occur—

> Syne to the Leglen wood, when it was late,
> To make a silent and a safe retreat.

I chose a fine summer Sunday, the only day my line of life allowed, and walked half a dozen of miles to pay my respects to the Leglen wood, with as much devout enthusiasm as ever pilgrim did to Loretto; and as I explored every den and dell where I could suppose my heroic countryman to have lodged, I recollect (for even then I was a rhymer) that my heart glowed with a wish to be able to make a song on him in some measure equal to his merits.

R. B.

TO MR. ARCHD. LAWRIE.[1]

MOSSGIEL, Nov. 13, 1786.

DEAR SIR,

I have, along with this, sent the two volumes of Ossian, with the remaining volume of the songs. Ossian I am not in such a hurry about, but I wish the songs, with the volume of the Scotch poets, returned, as soon as they can be conveniently dispatched. If they are left at Mr. Wilson's, the bookseller, Kilmarnock, they will easily reach me. My most respectable compliments to Mr. and Mrs. Lawrie, and a poet's warm wishes for their happiness;—to the young ladies, particularly the fair musician, whom I think much better qualified than ever David was, or could be, to charm an evil spirit out of Saul. Indeed, it needs not the feelings of a poet to be interested in one of the sweetest scenes of domestic peace and kindred love that ever I saw, as I think the peaceful unity of St. Margaret's Hill can only be excelled by the harmonious concord of the Apocalypse. I am, dear Sir, yours sincerely,

R. B.

[1] Son of the Rev. George Lawrie, minister of Loudoun parish. See Life, and note to poem beginning "O Thou dread Power," vol. ii. p. 183.

TO MONSR. ARCHIBALD LAWRIE,

COLLINE DE ST. MARGARETE.

MAUCHLINE, Nov. 15, 1786.

DEAR SIR,

If convenient, please return me by Connell, the bearer, the two volumes of songs I left last time I was at St. Margaret's Hill.

My best compliments to all the good family. *A Dieu je vous commende.*

R. B.

TO MR. ROBERT MUIR.

MOSSGIEL, 18th Nov. 1786.

MY DEAR SIR,

Inclosed you have "Tam Samson,"[2] as I intend to print him. I am thinking for my Edinburgh expedition on Monday or Tuesday, come se'en-night, for pos. I will see you on Tuesday first.

I am ever, Your much indebted,

R. B.

TO MISS WILHELMINA ALEXANDER.[3]

MOSSGIEL, 18th Nov. 1786.

MADAM,

Poets are such outré beings, so much the children of wayward fancy and capricious

[2] "Tam Samson's Elegy."

[3] See the note to the song of the "Lass o' Ballochmyle," vol. ii. pp. 165, 166, where a full account is given of the occasion and result of this letter.

whim, that I believe the world generally allows them a larger latitude in the laws of propriety, than the sober sons of judgment and prudence. I mention this as an apology for the liberties that a nameless stranger has taken with you in the enclosed poem, which he begs leave to present to you. Whether it has poetical merit any way worthy of the theme, I am not the proper judge: but it is the best my abilities can produce: and what to a good heart will, perhaps, be a superior grace, it is equally sincere as fervent.

The scenery was nearly taken from real life, though I dare say, Madam, you do not recollect it, as I believe you scarcely noticed the poetic *rêveur* as he wandered by you. I had roved out as chance directed, in the favourite haunts of my muse—the banks of the Ayr, to view nature in all the gaiety of the vernal year. The sun was flaming over the distant western hills: not a breath stirred the crimson opening blossom, or the verdant spreading leaf. It was a golden moment for a poetic heart. I listened to the feathered warblers, pouring their harmony on every hand, with a congenial kindred regard, and frequently turned out of my path, lest I should disturb their little songs, or frighten them to another station. Surely, said I to myself, he must be a wretch indeed, who, regardless of your harmonious endeavour to please him, can eye your elusive flights to discover your secret recesses, and to rob you of all the property nature gives you, your dearest comforts, your helpless nestlings. Even the hoary hawthorn twig that shot across the way, what heart but at such a time must have been interested in its welfare, and wished it preserved from the rudely-browsing cattle, or the withering eastern blast? Such was the scene—and such the hour, when, in a corner of my prospect, I spied one of the finest pieces of Nature's workmanship that ever crowned a poetic landscape, or blest a poet's eye, those visionary bards excepted who hold commerce with aerial beings! Had Calumny and Villany taken my walk, they had at that moment sworn eternal peace with such an object.

What an hour of inspiration for a poet! It would have raised plain dull historic prose into metaphor and measure.

The enclosed song was the work of my return home; and perhaps but poorly answers what might have been expected from such a scene. I am going to print a second edition of my poems, but cannot insert these verses without your permission.

I have the honour to be, Madam, Your most obedient, and very humble servant,

R. B.[1]

TO JOHN BALLANTINE, ESQ.,

BANKER, AYR.

MOSSGIEL, 20th November, 1786.

SIR,

Enclosed you have my first attempt in that irregular kind of measure in which many of our finest Odes are wrote.[2] How far I have succeeded I don't know, but I shall be happy to have your opinion on Friday first (24th Nov.), when I intend being in Ayr.

I hear of no returns from Edinburgh to Mr. Aiken respecting my second edition business, so I am thinking to set out beginning of next week for the City myself. If my first poetic patron, Mr. Aiken, is in town, I want to get his advice, both in my procedure and some little criticism affairs much, if business will permit you to honour me with a few minutes when I come down on Friday. I have the honour to be, Sir, Your much indebted humble servant,

R. B.

IN THE NAME OF THE NINE. *AMEN.*

We, Robert Burns, by virtue of a warrant from Nature, bearing date the twenty-fifth day of January, Anno Domini, one thousand seven hundred and fifty-nine,[3] Poet Laureat

[1] To the Glenriddell copy of this letter Burns added the following note:—"Well, Mr. Burns, *did* the lady give you the desired permission? No! She was too fine a lady to *notice* so plain a compliment. As to her great brothers, whom I have since met in life on more equal terms of respectability—Why should I quarrel their want of attention to me? When Fate swore that their purses should be full, Nature was equally positive that their heads should be empty. Men of their fashion were surely incapable of being impolite. 'Ye canna mak' a silk-purse o' a sow's lug.'"—R. B., 1792.

[2] The poem entitled "A Winter Night.'

[3] The poet's birthday.

and Bard-in-Chief, in and over the districts and countries of Kyle, Cunningham, and Carrick, of old extent, to our trusty and well-beloved William Chalmers and John M'Adam, students and practitioners in the ancient and mysterious science of confounding right and wrong.

RIGHT TRUSTY,

Be it known unto you, That whereas in the course of our care and watching over the order and police of all and sundry the manufacturers, retainers, and venders of poesy; bards, poets, poetasters, rhymers, jinglers, songsters, ballad-singers, &c &c. &c. &c., male and female—We have discovered a certain nefarious, abominable, and wicked song or ballad, a copy whereof We have here enclosed; Our Will therefore is, that Ye pitch upon and appoint the most execrable individual of that execrable species, known by the appellation, phrase, and nickname of The Deil's Yell Nowte;[1] and after having caused him to kindle a fire at the Cross of Ayr, ye shall, at noon tide of day, put into the said wretch's merciless hands the said copy of the said nefarious and wicked song, to be consumed by fire in presence of all beholders, in abhorrence of, and terrorem to, all such compositions and composers. And this in nowise leave ye undone, but have it executed in every point as this our mandate bears, before the twenty-fourth current, when in person We hope to applaud your faithfulness and zeal.

Given at Mauchline this twentieth day of November, Anno Domini one thousand seven hundred and eighty-six.

God save the Bard!

TO MR. GEORGE REID,

BARQUHARIE.[2]

[EDINBURGH, 29th Nov. 1786.]

MY DEAR SIR,

John Samson begged your pownie in such a manner, seconded by Mr. Dalrymple of Orangefield, that I hope you will forgive my not returning it by the carrier.

I left Mr. Prentice's on Monday night. There was a most agreeable little party in the evening; a Mr. Lang, a dainty body of a clergyman; Mr. and Mrs. Stodart—a glorious fellow with a still more glorious wife, with whom I breakfasted along with Mr. Prentice next morning. For Mr. Prentice, no words can do him justice. Sound sterling sense, and plain warm hospitality are truly his.

R. B.

TO JAMES DALRYMPLE, ESQ.,[3]

ORANGEFIELD.

[EDINBURGH, Nov. or Dec. 1786.]

DEAR SIR,

I suppose the devil is so elated with his success with you, that he is determined by a *coup de main* to complete his purposes on you all at once, in making you a poet. I broke open the letter you sent me; hummed over the rhymes; and, as I saw they were extempore, said to myself, they were very well; but when I saw at the bottom a name that I shall ever value with grateful respect, "I gapit wide, but naething spak." I was nearly as much struck as the friends of Job, of affliction-bearing memory, when they sat down with him seven days and seven nights, and spake not a word.

I am naturally of a superstitious cast, and as soon as my wonder-scared imagination regained its consciousness, and resumed its functions, I cast about what this mania of yours might portend. My foreboding ideas

[1] Old bachelors;—so says Dr. Currie; but Gilbert Burns alleges it is a scoffing appellation sometimes given to sheriff's officers, and other executors of the law, and that it is in that sense his brother has used it. The poem inclosed was "Holy Willie's Prayer."

[2] Mr. George Reid, Barquharie, near Ochiltree, Ayrshire, lent the poet a pony, on which he performed his first and memorable journey to Edinburgh. Mr. Prentice, mentioned in the letter, was a farmer at Covington, in Upper Lanarkshire, and a friend of Reid's. It was arranged that the poet should break his journey at Covington and pass a night there. John Samson was a brother of the more renowned "Tam" of the "Elegy."

[3] Mr. Dalrymple, a relative of Robert Aiken of Ayr, and cousin of the Earl of Glencairn, was a gentleman who interested himself in the fortunes of Burns. He was a warm-hearted man, enthusiastically given to Freemasonry, and, as the above letter indicates, occasionally tried his own hand at verse making. To this gentleman is due the poet's introduction to his noble patron, to the Earl of Buchan, Henry Erskine, and other notabilities of Edinburgh.

had the wide stretch of possibility; and several events, great in their magnitude, and important in their consequences, occurred to my fancy. The downfall of the conclave, or the crushing of the Cork rumps; a ducal coronet to Lord George Gordon, and the protestant interest; or St. Peter's keys to. . . .

You want to know how I come on. I am just in *statu quo*, or, not to insult a gentleman with my Latin, in "auld use and wont." The noble Earl of Glencairn took me by the hand to-day, and interested himself in my concerns, with a goodness like that benevolent Being whose image he so richly bears. He is a stronger proof of the immortality of the soul than any that philosophy ever produced. A mind like his can never die. Let the worshipful squire H. L., or the reverend Mass J. M. go into their primitive nothing. At best, they are but ill-digested lumps of chaos, only one of them strongly tinged with bituminous particles and sulphureous effluvia. But my noble patron, eternal as the heroic swell of magnanimity, and the generous throb of benevolence, shall look on with princely eye at "the war of elements, the wreck of matter, and the crash of worlds."[1]

R. B.

TO SIR JOHN WHITEFOORD.[2]

EDINBURGH, 1st Dec. [1786].

SIR,

Mr. Mackenzie,[3] in Mauchline, my very warm and worthy friend, has informed me how much you are pleased to interest yourself in my fate as a man, and (what to me is incomparably dearer) my fame as a poet. I have, Sir, in one or two instances, been patronized by those of your character in life, when I was introduced to their notice by social friends to them, and honoured acquaintances to me; but you are the first gentleman in the country whose benevolence and goodness of heart has interested himself for me, unsolicited and unknown. I am not master enough of the etiquette of these matters to know, nor did I stay to inquire, whether formal duty bade, or cold propriety disallowed, my thanking you in this manner, as I am convinced, from the light in which you kindly view me, that you will do me the justice to believe this letter is not the manœuvre of the needy, sharping author, fastening on those in upper life, who honour him with a little notice of him or his works. Indeed, the situation of poets is generally such, to a proverb, as may, in some measure, palliate that prostitution of heart and talents they have at times been guilty of. I do not think prodigality is, by any means, a necessary concomitant of a poetic turn, but I believe a careless, indolent attention to economy, is almost inseparable from it; then there must be in the heart of every bard of Nature's making, a certain modest sensibility, mixed with a kind of pride, that will ever keep him out of the way of those windfalls of fortune which frequently light on hardy impudence and foot-licking servility. It is not easy to imagine a more helpless state than his whose poetic fancy unfits him for the world, and whose character as a scholar gives him some pretensions to the *politesse* of life—yet is as poor as I am.

For my part, I thank Heaven, my star has been kinder; learning never elevated my ideas above the peasant's shed, and I have an independent fortune at the plough-tail.

I was surprised to hear that any one who pretended in the least to the manners of the gentleman, should be so foolish, or worse, to stoop to traduce the morals of such a one as I am, and so unhumanly cruel, too, as to meddle with that late most unfortunate, unhappy part of my story. With a tear of gratitude, I thank you, Sir, for the warmth with which you interposed in behalf of my conduct. I am, I acknowledge, too frequently the sport of whim, caprice, and passion, but reverence to God, and integrity to my fellow-creatures,

[1] Addison's *Cato*, v. 1.

[2] Sir John Whitefoord was proprietor of the estates of Whitefoord and Ballochmyle in Ayrshire, but, through the mismanagement of his predecessor (who is said to have furnished Scott with the groundwork of his character of Sir Arthur Wardour in the *Antiquary*) and the failure of the Ayr bank, he was obliged to dispose of these, and take up his residence at Whitefoord House in the Canongate of Edinburgh. (See the song entitled "The Braes of Ballochmyle" at vol. ii. p. 52, written on occasion of Miss Whitefoord leaving her family inheritance.) Sir John was one of the early patrons of Burns, and, what was better, a generous defender of his character, as the above letter shows. He died at Edinburgh in 1803.

[3] Dr. Mackenzie, the friend and medical attendant of the family of Sir John Whitefoord.

I hope I shall ever preserve. I have no return, Sir, to make you for your goodness but one—a return which, I am persuaded, will not be unacceptable—the honest, warm wishes of a grateful heart for your happiness, and every one of that lovely flock, who stand to you in a filial relation. If ever Calumny aim the poisoned shaft at them, may Friendship be by to ward the blow!

R. B.[1]

TO GAVIN HAMILTON, ESQ.,

MAUCHLINE.[2]

EDINBURGH, Dec. 7th, 1786.

HONOURED SIR,

I have paid every attention to your commands, but can only say what perhaps you will have heard before this reach you, that Muirkirklands were bought by a John Gordon, W.S., but for whom I know not; Mauchlands, Haugh Miln, &c., by a Fredrick Fotheringham, supposed to be for Ballochmyle Laird, and Adamhill and Shawwood were bought for Oswald's folks.—This is so imperfect an account, and will be so late ere it reach you, that were it not to discharge my conscience I would not trouble you with it; but after all my diligence I could make it no sooner nor better.[3]

For my own affairs, I am in a fair way of becoming as eminent as Thomas à Kempis or John Bunyan; and you may expect henceforth to see my birth-day inserted among the wonderful events, in the poor Robin's and Aberdeen Almanacks, along with the black Monday, and the battle of Bothwell-bridge.—My Lord Glencairn and the Dean of Faculty, Mr. H. Erskine, have taken me under their wing; and in all probability I shall soon be the tenth worthy, and the eighth wise man of the world. Through my lord's influence it is inserted in the records of the Caledonian Hunt, that they universally, one and all, subscribe for the second edition.[4]—My subscription bills come out to-morrow, and you shall have some of them next post.—I have met in Mr. Dalrymple of Orangefield, what Solomon emphatically calls "a friend that sticketh closer than a brother."—The warmth with which he interests himself in my affairs is of the same enthusiastic kind which you, Mr. Aiken, and the few patrons that took notice of my earlier poetic days, showed for the poor unlucky devil of a poet.

I always remember Mrs. Hamilton and Miss Kennedy in my poetic prayers, but you both in prose and verse.

May cauld ne'er catch you but a hap,[5]
Nor hunger but in plenty's lap!
Amen!

R. B.

TO JOHN BALLANTINE, ESQ.,

BANKER, AYR.

EDINBURGH, 13th Dec. 1786.

MY HONOURED FRIEND,

I would not write you till I could have it in my power to give you some account of myself and my matters—which by the bye is often no easy task.—I arrived here on Tuesday was se'nnight,[6] and have suffered ever since I came

[1] To this letter Sir John sent the following reply:—

EDINBURGH, 4th Dec. 1786.

SIR,

I received your letter a few days ago. I do not pretend to much interest, but what I have I shall be ready to exert in procuring the attainment of any object you have in view. Your character as a man (forgive my reversing your order), as well as a poet, entitles you, I think, to the assistance of every inhabitant of Ayrshire. I have been told you wish to be a gauger; I submit it to your consideration whether it would not be more desirable, if a sum could be raised by subscription for a second edition of your poems, to lay it out in the stocking of a small farm. I am persuaded it would be a line of life much more agreeable to your feelings, and in the end more satisfactory. When you have considered this, let me know, and whatever you determine upon I will endeavour to promote as far as my abilities will permit. With compliments to my friend the doctor, I am your friend and wellwisher, JOHN WHITEFOORD.

[2] Mr. Hamilton's connection with Burns has been already described in previous notes.

[3] The lands of Mauchline Mains, East, West, and South Mossgavil, Haugh-Mill, &c., in Ayrshire, which the Loudoun family was at this date compelled to dispose of, were sold in the Exchange Coffee-House, Edinburgh, on the 5th Dec. 1786. Burns seems to have been commissioned by Gavin Hamilton (factor of the Earl of Loudoun in Mauchline parish) to send him early intelligence of the result of the sale.

[4] Burns seems to have been under a misapprehension with respect to this transaction. See note to following letter.

[5] "But a hap"=without a covering.

[6] The poet here makes a strange misstatement. He had now been over a *fortnight* in Edinburgh.

to town with a miserable head-ache and stomach complaint, but am now a good deal better.—I have found a worthy warm friend in Mr. Dalrymple of Orangefield, who introduced me to Lord Glencairn, a man whose worth and brotherly kindness to me, I shall remember when time shall be no more.—By his interest it is passed in the "Caledonian Hunt," and entered in their books, that they are to take each a copy of the second edition, for which they are to pay one guinea.[1]—I have been introduced to a good many of the *noblesse*, but my avowed patrons and patronesses are, the Duchess of Gordon—the Countess of Glencairn, with my Lord, and Lady Betty[2]—the Dean of Faculty—Sir John Whitefoord.—I have likewise warm friends among the literati; Professors Stewart, Blair, and Mr. Mackenzie—the Man of Feeling.—An unknown hand left ten guineas for the Ayrshire bard with Mr. Sibbald, which I got. I since have discovered my generous unknown friend to be Patrick Miller, Esq., brother to the Justice Clerk; and drank a glass of claret with him by invitation at his own house yesternight. I am nearly agreed with Creech to print my book, and I suppose I will begin on Monday. I will send a subscription bill or two, next post; when I intend writing my first kind patron, Mr. Aiken. I saw his son to-day, and he is very well.

Dugald Stewart, and some of my learned friends, put me in the periodical paper called the *Lounger*, a copy of which I here inclose you.[3]—I was, Sir, when I was first honoured with your notice, too obscure; now I tremble lest I should be ruined, by being dragged too suddenly into the glare of polite and learned observation.

I shall certainly, my ever honoured patron, write you an account of my every step; and better health and more spirits may enable me to make it something better than this stupid matter-of-fact epistle.

I have the honour to be, good Sir, your ever grateful humble servant,

R. B.

If any of my friends write me, my direction is, care of Mr. Creech, bookseller.

[1] It would appear that Burns had mistaken for an accomplished fact a *promise* by Lord Glencairn that he would make such a motion before his assembled brethren of the Caledonian Hunt. The entry was made in the books about a month after this date, and from the following copy of the minute it will be seen, too, that the bard was much in error as to the price to be given for each copy:—

10th Jan. 1787.

"A motion being made by the Earl of Glencairn, and seconded by Sir John Whitefoord, in favour of Mr. Burns, Ayrshire, who had dedicated the new edition of his poems to the Caledonian Hunt, the meeting were of opinion that, in consideration of his superior merit, as well as of the compliment to them, Mr. Hagart should be directed to subscribe for one hundred copies, in their name, for which he would pay to Mr. Burns *twenty five pounds*, upon the publication of his book."

[2] Lady Betty Cunningham, an unmarried sister of Lord Glencairn.

[3] An appreciative criticism of Burns's poems, written by Henry Mackenzie, the celebrated author of *The Man of Feeling*, appeared in the *Lounger* of Dec. 9.

[4] Dr. Hately Waddell, who was the first to publish the above letter, says it is in a fragmentary condition

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TO MR. ROBERT MUIR,

KILMARNOCK.

EDINBURGH, 15th Dec. 1786.

MY DEAR SIR,

I delayed writing you till I [was] able to give you some rational account of [myself] and my affairs. I am got under the p[atronage] of the Duchess of Gordon, Countess Dowager of Glencairn, Sir John Whitefoord, the Dean of Faculty, Professors Blair, Stewart, Gre[gory?], and several others of the noblesse and literati. I believe I shall begin at Mr. Creech's as [publisher]. I am still more undetermined as to the future; and, as usual, [ne]ver think of it. I have now neither house nor home that I can call my own, and live on the world at large. I am just a poor wayfaring Pilgrim on the road to Parnassus, a thoughtless wanderer and sojourner in a strange land. [I] received a very kind letter from Mr. A. Dalziel, for which please return my thanks; and [tell] him I will write him in a day or two. Mr. Parker, Charles [Samson], Dr. Corsan, and honest John my *quondam* printer, I remember in my prayers when I pray in rhyme. To all of whom till I have an opportunity. . . .

P.S. I forgot to tell you how honest-hearted [Andrew Bruce?] and [his wife?] Matty . . . She is [no]blest of the Creator's . . . .[4]

TO MR. ROBERT AIKEN, AYR.

EDINBURGH, 16th Dec. 1786.

DEAR PATRON OF MY VIRGIN MUSE,

I wrote Mr. Ballantine at large all my operations and "eventful story," since I came to town,—I have found in Mr. Creech, who is my agent forsooth, and Mr. Smellie, who is to be my printer, that honour and goodness of heart which I always expect in Mr. Aiken's friends. Mr. Dalrymple of Orangefield I shall ever remember; my Lord Glencairn I shall ever pray for. The Maker of man has great honour in the workmanship of his Lordship's heart. May he find that patronage and protection in his guardian angel that I have found in him! His Lordship has sent a parcel of subscription bills to the Marquis of Graham, with downright orders to get them filled up with all the first Scottish names about Court.—He has likewise wrote to the Duke of Montague, and is about to write to the Duke of Portland for their Graces' interest in behalf of the Scotch Bard's subscription.

You will very probably think, my honoured friend, that a hint about the mischievous nature of intoxicated vanity may not be unseasonable; but, alas! you are wide of the mark. Various concurring circumstances have raised my fame as a Poet to a height which I am absolutely certain I have no merits to support; and I look down on the future as I would into the bottomless pit.

You shall have one or two more bills when I have an opportunity of a carrier. I am ever, with the sincerest gratitude, Honoured Sir, your most devoted humble servant,

R. B.

TO MR. ROBERT MUIR.

EDINBURGH, Dec. 20th, 1786.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I have just time for the carrier, to tell you that I received your letter; of which I shall say no more but what a lass of my acquaintance said of her bastard wean; she said she "didna ken wha was the father exactly, but she suspected it was some o' thae bonnie blackguard smugglers, for it was like them." So I only say, your obliging epistle was like you. I inclose you a parcel of subscription bills. Your affair of sixty copies is also like you; but it would not be like me to comply.

Your friend's notion of my life has put a crotchet in my head of sketching it in some future epistle to you. My compliments to Charles and Mr. Parker.

R. B.

and has no address; but from the names and references occurring in it, it is manifestly written to Mr. Muir. The above, together with numerous other items of the poet's correspondence with Muir, came into the hands of William Reid, bookseller, Glasgow, shortly before whose death many of them were hopelessly damaged by water through an inundation of the Clyde.

TO MR. WILLIAM CHALMERS,

WRITER, AYR.

EDINBURGH, Dec. 27th, 1786.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I confess I have sinned the sin for which there is hardly any forgiveness—ingratitude to friendship—in not writing you sooner; but of all men living, I had intended to have sent you an entertaining letter; and by all the plodding, stupid powers, that, in nodding conceited majesty, preside over the dull routine of business—a heavily-solemn oath this!—I am and have been, ever since I came to Edinburgh, as unfit to write a letter of humour, as to write a commentary on the Revelation of St. John the Divine, who was banished to the Isle of Patmos, by the cruel and bloody Domitian, son to Vespasian and brother to Titus, both emperors of Rome, and who was himself an emperor, and raised the second or third persecution, I forget which, against the Christians, and after throwing the said Apostle John, brother to the Apostle James, commonly called James the Greater, to distinguish him from another James, who was, on some account or other, known by the name of James the Less—after throwing him into a cauldron of boiling oil, from which he was miraculously preserved, he banished the poor son of Zebedee to a desert island in the Archipelago, where he was gifted with the second sight, and saw as many wild beasts as I have seen since I came to Edinburgh; which, a circumstance not very uncommon in story-telling, brings me back to where I set out.

To make you some amends for what, before

you reach this paragraph, you will have suffered, I inclose you two poems I have carded and spun since I passed Glenbuck.[1] One blank in the address to Edinburgh—"Fair B——," is heavenly Miss Burnet, daughter to Lord Monboddo, at whose house I have had the honour to be more than once.[2] There has not been anything nearly like her in all the combinations of beauty, grace, and goodness, the great Creator has formed, since Milton's Eve on the first day of her existence.

I have sent you a parcel of subscription bills, and have written to Mr. Ballantine and Mr. Aiken to call on you for some of them if they want them.

My direction is—care of Andrew Bruce, merchant, Bridge Street.

R. B.

TO LORD MONBODDO,

ST. JOHN STREET

SATURDAY EVE [30th Dec. 1786].

I shall do myself the honour, Sir, to dine with you to-morrow, as you obligingly request.

My conscience twitting me with having neglected to send Miss Eliza[3] a song she once mentioned to me as a song she wished to have—I inclose it for her, with one or two more, by way of a peace-offering.—I have the honour to be, my Lord, your very humble servt.,

R. B.

TO MR. JAMES SIBBALD,

BOOKSELLER.[4]

LAWNMARKET [3rd Jan. 1787].

SIR,

So little am I acquainted with the modes and manners of the more public and polished walks of life, that I often feel myself embarrassed how to express the feelings of my heart, particularly gratitude.

——Rude am I in speech,
And little blest in the set, polish'd phrase;
For since these arms of mine had seven years' pith,
Till now, some nine moons wasted, they have used
Their dearest efforts in the rural field;
And therefore, little can I grace my cause
In speaking for myself.[5]

The warmth with which you have befriended an obscure man and young author in your three last Magazines—I can only say, Sir, I feel the weight of the obligation, and wish I could express my sense of it. In the meantime accept of this conscious acknowledgment from, Sir, Your obliged servant,

R. B.

TO GAVIN HAMILTON, ESQ.

EDINBURGH, 7th Jan. 1787.

. . . To tell the truth among friends, I feel a miserable blank in my heart, and I don't think I shall ever meet with so delicious an armful again. She [Jean Armour] has her faults; and so have you and I; and so has everybody:

Their tricks and craft hae put me daft;
They've ta'en me in and a' that;
But clear your decks, and here's "The Sex,"
I like the jads for a' that:
For a' that and a' that,
And twice as muckle's a' that, &c.

. . . I have met with a very pretty girl, a Lothian farmer's daughter, whom I have almost persuaded to accompany me to the West country, should I ever return to settle there. By the by, a Lothian farmer is about an Ayrshire squire of the lower kind; and I had a most delicious ride from Leith to her house yesternight in a hackney coach, with her brother, two sisters and brother's wife. We had dined all together at a common friend's house in Leith, and danced, drank, and sang till late enough. The night was dark, the claret had been good, and I thirsty . . .

R. B.

[1] One certainly the "Address to Edinburgh," the other probably his "Address to a Haggis." Glenbuck is in Ayrshire, just on the border of Lanarkshire.

[2] See note to the "Address to Edinburgh;" also next letter, with note.

[3] Miss Burnett, daughter of Lord Monboddo. See note to poem "On the Death of the late Miss Burnet."

[4] Mr. James Sibbald was the publisher of a monthly periodical, the *Edinburgh Magazine*. The three numbers spoken of were those of October, November, and December, published respectively in the beginning of the month following. Each number gave extracts from the Kilmarnock edition, accompanied with appreciative comments by the editor.

[5] *Othello*, i. 3. [Slightly misquoted to suit the circumstances.]

TO MR. MACKENZIE, SURGEON, MAUCHLINE.

EDINBURGH, 11th Jan. 1787.

MY DEAR SIR,

Yours gave me something like the pleasure of an old friend's face. I saw *your* friend and *my* honoured patron, Sir John Whitefoord, just after I read your letter, and gave him your respectful compts. He was pleased to say many handsome things of you, which I heard with the more satisfaction as I knew them to be just.

His son John, who calls very frequently on me, is in a fuss to-day like a coronation. This is the great day—the Assembly and Ball of the Caledonian Hunt; and John has had the good luck to pre-engage the hand of the beauty-famed and wealth-celebrated Miss M'Adam, our countrywoman. Between friends, John is desperately in for it there, and I am afraid will be desperate indeed.

I am sorry to send you the last speech and dying words of the *Lounger*.

A gentleman waited on me yesterday, and gave me by Lord Eglintoun's order, ten guineas by way of subscription for a brace of copies of my second edition.

I met with Lord Maitland[1] and a brother of his to-day at breakfast. They are exceedingly easy, accessible, agreeable fellows, and seemingly pretty clever.—I am ever, my dear Sir, Yours,

R. B.

TO THE EARL OF EGLINTON.[2]

EDINBURGH, 11th January, 1787.

MY LORD,

As I have but slender pretensions to philosophy, I cannot rise to the exalted ideas of a citizen of the world at large; but have all those national prejudices, which I believe glow peculiarly strong in the breast of a Scotchman. There is scarcely any thing to which I am so feelingly alive as the honour and welfare of old Scotia: and as a poet, I have no higher enjoyment than singing her sons and daughters. Fate had cast my station in the veriest shades of life; but never did a heart pant more ardently than mine to be distinguished; though till very lately I looked on every side for a ray of light in vain. It is easy then to guess how supremely I was gratified to be honoured with the countenance and approbation of one of my dear loved country's most illustrious sons, when Mr. Wauchope called on me yesterday on the part of your lordship. Your munificence, my lord, certainly deserves my very grateful acknowledgments; but your patronage is a bounty peculiarly suited to my feelings.[3] I am not master enough of the etiquette of life to know, whether there be not some impropriety in troubling your lordship with my thanks in this manner, but my heart whispered me to do it. From the emotions of my inmost soul I do it. Selfish ingratitude I hope I am incapable of; and mercenary servility, I trust, I shall ever have so much honest pride as to detest.

R. B.

TO JOHN BALLANTINE, ESQ.

EDINBURGH, Jan. 14th, 1787.

MY HONOURED FRIEND,

It gives me a secret comfort to observe in myself that I am not yet so far gone as Willie Gaw's Skate, "past redemption;"[4] for I have still this favourable symptom of grace, that when my conscience, as in the case of this letter, tells me I am leaving something undone that I ought to do, it teazes me eternally till I do it.

I am still "dark as was Chaos" in respect to futurity. My generous friend, Mr. Patrick Miller, brother to the Justice Clerk, has been talking with me about a lease of some farm or

[1] Afterwards the eighth Earl of Lauderdale. He was at this time a conspicuous member of the House of Commons on the opposition side.

[2] Archibald, eleventh Earl of Eglinton, who died in 1796. As he had no male issue the title and about one half the lands went to his cousin, Colonel Hugh Montgomery of Coilsfield, alluded to in the "Brigs of Ayr."

[3] As mentioned in preceding letter, the earl subscribed ten guineas for two copies of the poet's works, and otherwise gave him his patronage.

[4] "This is one of many such old saws, picked up by the poet from the lips of his own mother, who possessed a rich store of traditionary humour and wisdom."—CROMEK.

other in an estate called Dalswinton, which he has lately bought near Dumfries. Some life-rented embittering recollections whisper me that I will be happier any where than in my old neighbourhood, but Mr. Miller is no judge of land; and though I dare say he means to favour me, yet he may give me, in his opinion, an advantageous bargain that may ruin me. I am to take a tour by Dumfries as I return, and have promised to meet Mr. Miller on his lands some time in May.

I went to a mason-lodge yesternight, where the most Worshipful Grand Master Charteris, and all the Grand Lodge of Scotland visited. The meeting was numerous and elegant; all the different lodges about town were present, in all their pomp. The Grand Master, who presided with great solemnity and honour to himself as a gentleman and mason, among other general toasts, gave "Caledonia, and Caledonia's Bard, Brother Burns," which rung through the whole assembly with multiplied honours and repeated acclamations. As I had no idea such a thing would happen, I was downright thunderstruck, and, trembling in every nerve, made the best return in my power. Just as I had finished, some of the grand officers said so loud that I could hear, with a most comforting accent, "Very well indeed!" which set me something to rights again.

I have just now had a visit from my landlady,[1] who is a staid, sober, piously-disposed sculdudry-abhorring widow, coming on her climacteric. She is at present in great tribulation respecting some "Daughters of Belial" who are on the floor immediately above. My landlady, who, as I have said, is a flesh-disciplining, godly matron, firmly believes her husband is in heaven; and having been very happy with him on earth, she vigorously and perseveringly practises some of the most distinguished Christian virtues, such as attending church, railing against vice, &c., that she might be qualified to meet her quondam Bed-fellow in that happy place where the unclean and the ungodly shall never enter. This no doubt requires some strong exertions in a hale well-kept widow of forty-five; and as our floors are low and ill-plastered, we can easily distinguish our laughter-loving, night-rejoicing neighbours when they are eating, when they are drinking, when they are &c., &c. My worthy landlady tosses sleepless and unquiet—"looking for rest and finding none"—the whole night. Just now she told me—though by the by, she is sometimes dubious that I am, in her phrase, "but a rough and roun' Christian"—that "we should not be uneasy and envious because the wicked enjoy the good things of this life," for these base jades who, in her own words, "lie up gandy-going with their filthy fellows, drinking the best of wines, and singing abominable songs, they shall one day lie in hell, weeping and wailing, and gnashing their teeth over a cup of God's wrath."

I have to-day corrected my 152d page. My best good wishes to Mr. Aiken.

I am ever, Dear Sir, Your much indebted humble servant,

R. B.

[1] The landlady was, says Chambers on the authority of the poet's friend John Richmond, Mrs. Carfrae, Baxter's Close, Lawnmarket. This graphic and humorous, albeit slightly coarse, paragraph was first published in W. Scott Douglas's Edinburgh Edition. As giving us a glimpse of the poet's everyday surroundings in Edinburgh it is worth having.

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

EDINBURGH, 15th January, 1787.

MADAM,

Yours of the 9th current, which I am this moment honoured with, is a deep reproach to me for ungrateful neglect. I will tell you the real truth, for I am miserably awkward at a fib—I wished to have written to Dr. Moore[2] before I wrote to you; but, though every day since I received yours of December 30th, the idea, the wish to write to him has constantly pressed on my thoughts, yet I could not for my soul set about it. I know his fame and character, and I am one of "the sons of little men." To write him a mere matter-of-fact affair, like a merchant's order, would be disgracing the little character I have; and to write the author of "The View of Society and Manners" a letter of sentiment—I declare every artery runs cold at the thought. I shall try, however, to write to him to-morrow or next day. His kind interposition in my behalf I have already experienced, as a gentle-

[2] See note to next letter.

man waited on me the other day, on the part of Lord Eglinton, with ten guineas, by way of subscription for two copies of my next edition.

The word you object to in the mention I have made of my glorious countryman and your immortal ancestor, is indeed borrowed from Thomson; but it does not strike me as an improper epithet. I distrusted my own judgment on your finding fault with it, and applied for the opinion of some of the literati here, who honour me with their critical strictures, and they all allow it to be proper.[1] The song you ask I cannot recollect, and I have not a copy of it. I have not composed any thing on the great Wallace, except what you have seen in print; and the inclosed, which I will print in this edition.[2] You will see I have mentioned some others of the name. When I composed my "Vision" long ago, I had attempted a description of Kyle, of which the additional stanzas are a part as it originally stood. My heart glows with a wish to be able to do justice to the merits of the "Saviour of his Country," which sooner or later I shall at least attempt.

You are afraid I shall grow intoxicated with my prosperity as a poet: alas! Madam, I know myself and the world too well. I do not mean any airs of affected modesty; I am willing to believe that my abilities deserve some notice; but in a most enlightened, informed age and nation, when poetry is and has been the study of men of the first natural genius, aided with all the powers of polite learning, polite books, and polite company—to be dragged forth to the full glare of learned and polite observation, with all my imperfections of awkward rusticity and crude unpolished ideas on my head—I assure you, Madam, I do not dissemble when I tell you I tremble for the consequences. The novelty of a poet in my obscure situation, without any of those advantages which are reckoned necessary for that character, at least at this time of day, has raised a partial tide of public notice which has borne me to a height, where I am absolutely, feelingly certain, my abilities are inadequate to support me; and too surely do I see that time when the same tide will leave me, and recede, perhaps as far below the mark of truth. I do not say this in the ridiculous affectation of self-abasement and modesty. I have studied myself, and know what ground I occupy; and however a friend or the world may differ from me in that particular, I stand for my own opinion, in silent resolve, with all the tenaciousness of property. I mention this to you once for all to disburthen my mind, and I do not wish to hear or say more about it.—But,

When proud fortune's ebbing tide recedes,

you will bear me witness, that when my bubble of fame was at the highest I stood unintoxicated, with the inebriating cup in my hand, looking forward with rueful resolve to the hastening time, when the blow of Calumny should dash it to the ground, with all the eagerness of vengeful triumph.

Your patronizing me and interesting yourself in my fame and character as a poet, I rejoice in; it exalts me in my own idea; and whether you can or cannot aid me in my subscription is a trifle. Has a paltry subscription-bill any charms to the heart of a bard, compared with the patronage of the descendant of the immortal Wallace?

R. B.

[1] The phrase which Mrs. Dunlop objected to occurred in the second line of "The Cotter's Saturday Night," which ran originally thus:

That stream'd through great, unhappy Wallace' heart.

[2] Stanzas in the "Vision," beginning "By stately tow'r or palace fair," and ending with the first duan.

TO DR. MOORE.[3]

EDINBURGH, Jan. 1787.

SIR,

Mrs. Dunlop has been so kind as to send me extracts of letters she has had from you,

[3] John Moore, M.D., the author of *Zeluco*, was the son of the Rev. Charles Moore, Stirling, and was born there in 1730. His father died while Dr. Moore was yet a child, when his mother removed with him to Glasgow. At Glasgow Dr. Moore received both his elementary and academical education. So precocious were his talents, that in 1747, when only seventeen years of age, he was honoured with the especial patronage of Colonel Campbell, afterwards the fifth Duke of Argyle, by whom he was introduced to the hospitals connected with the British army in Flanders, and brought under the notice of various distinguished officers, as a young man likely to be an ornament to the medical profession. At the conclusion of the war he was for some time an *attaché* to the British embassy of Lord Albemarle in Paris.

where you do the rustic bard the honour of noticing him and his works. Those who have felt the anxieties and solicitudes of authorship, can only know what pleasure it gives to be noticed in such a manner, by judges of the first character. Your criticisms, Sir, I receive with reverence: only I am sorry they mostly came too late: a peccant passage or two that I would certainly have altered, were gone to the press.

The hope to be admired for ages is, in by far the greater part of those even who are authors of repute, an unsubstantial dream. For my part, my first ambition was, and still my strongest wish is, to please my compeers, the rustic inmates of the hamlet, while ever-changing language and manners shall allow me to be relished and understood. I am very willing to admit that I have some poetical abilities; and as few, if any, writers, either moral or poetical, are intimately acquainted with the classes of mankind among whom I have chiefly mingled, I may have seen men and manners in a different phasis from what is common, which may assist originality of thought. Still I know very well the novelty of my character has by far the greatest share in the learning and polite notice I have lately had: and in a language where Pope and Churchill have raised a laugh, and Shenstone and Gray drawn the tear; where Thomson and Beattie have painted the landscape, and Lyttelton and Collins described the heart, I am not vain enough to hope for distinguished poetic fame.

R. B.[1]

He afterwards settled in practice in Glasgow as the partner of Mr. Hamilton, the university professor of anatomy. A certain dislike, however, to the drudgery of medical practice prevented him from enjoying that amount of public patronage to which he was entitled by his talents. It was therefore with no unwilling mind that, early in 1769, though for some years married and the father of several children, he agreed to take the charge of the young Duke of Hamilton, stepson of his first patron, a youth of fourteen, whose health was such as to require the constant attendance of a physician. With this young nobleman Dr. Moore made one short excursion on the Continent. But the connection was abruptly dissolved in July by the death of the Duke. In the following year Dr. Moore was selected to attend the next brother and heir of the deceased duke, and with him he spent five years in continental travel, finally returning in 1778, when his grace had attained his majority. In that year Dr. Moore removed his family to London, with the design of prosecuting his profession there. As yet he had given the world no decided proof of his literary talents; but this he now did (1779) by the publication of his *View of Society and Manners in France, Switzerland, and Germany*,—a work of so much vivacity and intelligence that it instantly attained a great popularity in the author's own country, and was translated into French, German, and Italian. Encouraged by the success of his first literary venture, he soon after published a similar work on Italy, which was, however, less favourably received.

In 1785 he produced a volume entitled *Medical Sketches*, which treats, rather in a popular than a scientific manner, on several important topics relative to health and disease, not without an intermixture of pleasant stories and humorous sarcasm. It was at the close of the ensuing year that his attention was drawn to the poetry of Burns. Some expressions of admiration which he had employed regarding it in a letter to Mrs. Dunlop, and which that lady transmitted to Burns, led to a correspondence between the learned physician and the comparatively unlettered bard, in which the one party appears kind without the least affectation of superiority, and the other respectful with as little display of servility. To Dr. Moore, the poet, in the ensuing August (1787), addressed a sketch of his own life, which was published in the front of Dr. Currie's memoir, and will be found in vol. i. of this work immediately after Lockhart's *Life*.

Dr. Moore, when on the verge of sixty (1789), appeared for the first time as a writer of fiction. His novel of *Zeluco*, which was then published, took a very respectable place amongst works of that class, mainly on account of the powerful moral painting which forms the most conspicuous feature of its composition. His subsequent novels, entitled *Edward* and *Mordaunt*, respectively published in 1796 and 1800, were less esteemed. The interest he felt in the affairs of France, and probably some design of making them the subject of a book, induced him to proceed, late in the summer of 1792, to Paris. He there witnessed the insurrection of the 10th of August, the dethronement of the king, the terrific massacres of September, and the tremendous party struggles which marked the remainder of the year. He was consequently enabled to gratify the curiosity of the British public by a work under the title of *A Journal during a Residence in France*, &c. A subsequent work, under the title of *A View of the Causes and Progress of the French Revolution*, closes the list of Dr. Moore's publications. After several years spent in ease and retirement at Richmond, he died at his house in Clifford Street, London, February 20th, 1802. He left five sons, the eldest of whom was the gallant and lamented General Sir John Moore.

The portrait from which our engraving is taken was painted about 1770, by William Cochrane (known as Cochrane of Rome).

[1] Dr. Moore's answer to the above letter was as follows:—

"CLIFFORD STREET, January, 23, 1787.

"SIR,

"I have just received your letter, by which I find I have reason to complain of my friend Mrs. Dunlop,

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TO MR. CLEGHORN,[1]

SAUGHTON MILLS, NEAR EDINBURGH.

DEAR CLEGHORN,

You will see by the above that I have added a stanza to "Bonnie Dundee." If you think it will do, you may set it agoing—

Upon a ten stringed instrument,
And on the psaltery.

R. B.

MR. CLEGHORN, FARMER.

God bless the trade.

for transmitting to you extracts of my letters to her, by much too freely and too carelessly written for your perusal. I must forgive her, however, in consideration of her good intention, as you will forgive me, I hope, for the freedom I use with certain expressions, in consideration of my admiration of the poems in general. If I may judge of the author's disposition from his works, with all the other good qualities of a poet he has not the irritable temper ascribed to that race of men by one of their own number, whom you have the happiness to resemble in ease and curious felicity of expression. Indeed the poetical beauties, however original and brilliant, and lavishly scattered, are not all I admire in your works; the love of your native country, that feeling sensibility to all the objects of humanity, and the independent spirit which breathes through the whole, give me a most favourable impression of the Poet, and have made me often regret that I did not see the poems, the certain effect of which would have been my seeing the author, last summer, when I was longer in Scotland than I have been for many years.

"I rejoice very sincerely at the encouragement you receive at Edinburgh, and I think you peculiarly fortunate in the patronage of Dr. Blair, who, I am informed, interests himself very much for you. I beg to be remembered to him; nobody can have a warmer regard for that gentleman than I have, which, independent of the worth of his character, would be kept alive by the memory of our common friend, the late Mr. George B[annatyn]e.

"Before I received your letter, I sent inclosed in a letter to Mrs. Dunlop a sonnet by Miss Williams, a young poetical lady, which she wrote on reading your 'Mountain-daisy;' perhaps it may not displease you:

While soon, 'the garden's flaunting flowers' decay,
And scatter'd on the earth neglected lie,
The 'Mountain-daisy,' cherish'd by the ray
A poet drew from heaven, shall never die.
Ah, like that lonely flower the poet rose!
'Mid penury's bare soil and bitter gale;
He felt each storm that on the mountain blows,
Nor ever knew the shelter of the vale.
By genius in her native vigour nurst,
On nature with impassion'd look he gazed;
Then through the cloud of adverse fortune burst
Indignant, and in light unborrow'd blazed.
Scotia! from rude affliction shield thy bard;
His heaven-taught numbers Fame herself will guard.

"I have been trying to add to the number of your subscribers, but find many of my acquaintance are already among them. I have only to add, that, with every sentiment of esteem, and the most cordial good wishes,

"I am your obedient humble servant,
"J. MOORE."

[1] Cleghorn was one of the genial fellows who composed the Crochallan Fencibles, of which Burns became a member on his first visit to Edinburgh. The version of "Bonnie Dundee," as sent in the letter, will be found in the section containing Songs altered by Burns.

TO THE REV. G. LAWRIE,[2]

NEWMILNS, NEAR KILMARNOCK.

EDIN., Feb. 5th, 1787.

REVEREND AND DEAR SIR,

When I look at the date of your kind letter, my heart reproaches me severely with ingratitude in neglecting so long to answer it. I will not trouble you with any account, by way of apology, of my hurried life and distracted attention: do me the justice to believe that my delay by no means proceeded from want of respect. I feel, and ever shall feel for you, the mingled sentiments of esteem for a friend and reverence for a father.

I thank you, Sir, with all my soul for your friendly hints, though I do not need them so much as my friends are apt to imagine. You are dazzled with newspaper accounts and distant reports; but, in reality, I have no great temptation to be intoxicated with the cup of prosperity. Novelty may attract the attention of mankind awhile; to it I owe my present *éclat;* but I see the time not far distant when the popular tide which has borne me to a height of which I am, perhaps, unworthy, shall recede with silent celerity, and leave me a barren waste of sand, to descend at my leisure to my former station. I do not say this in the affectation of modesty; I see the consequence is unavoidable, and am prepared for it. I had been at a good deal of pains to form a just, impartial estimate of my intellectual powers before I came here: I have not added, since I came to Edinburgh, anything to the account; and I trust I shall take every atom of it back to my shades, the coverts of my unnoticed early years.

[2] See our notice of the Rev. Dr Lawrie, and of his instrumentality in bringing Burns before the Edinburgh public, through drawing Dr. Blacklock's attention to his poems, in vol. ii. of this work, p. 183. See also Lockhart's *Life*, p. 52.

In Dr Blacklock, whom I see very often, I have found what I would have expected in our friend, a clear head and an excellent heart.

By far the most agreeable hours I spend in Edinburgh must be placed to the account of Miss Lawrie and her pianoforte. I cannot help repeating to you and Mrs. Lawrie a compliment that Mr. Mackenzie, the celebrated "Man of Feeling," paid to Miss Lawrie, the other night, at the concert. I had come in at the interlude, and sat down by him till I saw Miss Lawrie in a seat not very distant, and went up to pay my respects to her. On my return to Mr. Mackenzie he asked me who she was; I told him 'twas the daughter of a reverend friend of mine in the west country. He returned, there was something very striking, to his idea, in her appearance. On my desiring to know what it was, he was pleased to say, "She has a great deal of the elegance of a well-bred lady about her, with all the sweet simplicity of a country girl."

My compliments to all the happy inmates of St. Margaret's.

I am, my dear Sir, Yours, most gratefully,

ROBERT BURNS.

TO MISS ——.[1]

MY DEAR COUNTRYWOMAN,

I am so impatient to show you that I am once more at peace with you, that I send you the book I mentioned directly, rather than wait the uncertain time of my seeing you. I am afraid I have mislaid or lost Collins' Poems, which I promised to Miss Irvin. If I can find them, I will forward them by you: if not, you must apologize for me.

I know you will laugh at it when I tell you that your piano and you together have played the deuce somehow about my heart. My breast has been widowed these many months, and I thought myself proof against the fascinating witchcraft; but I am afraid you will "feelingly convince me what I am."[2] I say, I am afraid, because I am not sure what is the matter with me. I have one miserable bad symptom; when you whisper, or look kindly to another, it gives me a draught of damnation. I have a kind of wayward wish to be with you ten minutes by yourself, though what I would say, Heaven above knows, for I am sure I know not. I have no formed design in all this; but just, in the nakedness of my heart, write you down a mere matter-of-fact story. You may perhaps give yourself airs of distance on this, and that will completely cure me; but I wish you would not; just let us meet, if you please, in the old "beaten way of friendship."[3]

I will not subscribe myself your humble servant, for that is a phrase, I think, at least fifty miles off from the heart; but I will conclude with sincerely wishing that the Great Protector of innocence may shield you from the barbed dart of Calumny, and hand you by the covert snare of deceit.

R. B.

[1] The recipient of this letter is not known. We put it in its present place because we think that, not improbably, it was sent to the Miss Lawrie of the preceding letter, who, along with her pianoforte, enabled the very susceptible poet to spend some "most agreeable hours." No safe conjecture, however, can be formed as to the person meant, beyond that of her being an Ayrshire lady, which the term "countrywoman" implies, and which of course Miss Lawrie was. Another conjecture is, that it was addressed to Miss Margaret (or "Peggy") Chalmers, to whom a number of letters by Burns will be found in our pages.

[2] Feelingly persuade me what I am.
—*As You Like It*, ii. 1.

[3] In the beaten way of friendship.
—*Hamlet*, ii. 2.

A frequent quotation of the bard's.

TO THE HONOURABLE BAILIES OF CANONGATE, EDINBURGH.[4]

6th February, 1787.

GENTLEMEN,

I am sorry to be told that the remains of Robert Fergusson, the so justly celebrated poet,

[4] The letter thus erroneously addressed was delivered to the proper authorities, the managers of the Kirk and Kirkyard Funds of Canongate, who, at a meeting held on the 22nd February, had the matter brought officially before them by their treasurer, who produced the above petition. After being read and considered the document was ordered to be engrossed in their sederunt book, along with the *grant*, which runs as follows:

"Therefore the said Managers, in consideration of the laudable and disinterested motion of Mr. Burns, and the propriety of his request, did, and hereby do, unanimously grant power and liberty to the said Robert Burns to erect a headstone at the grave of the

a man whose talents for ages to come will do honour to our Caledonian name, lie in your churchyard among the ignoble dead, unnoticed and unknown.

Some memorial to direct the steps of the lovers of Scottish song, when they wish to shed a tear over the "narrow house" of the bard who is no more, is surely a tribute due to Fergusson's memory—a tribute I wish to have the honour of paying.

I petition you then, Gentlemen, to permit me to lay a simple stone over his revered ashes, to remain an unalienable property to his deathless fame. I have the honour to be, Gentlemen, your very humble servant,

ROBERT BURNS.

TO THE EARL OF BUCHAN.[1]

EDINBURGH, [7th Feb. 1787.]

MY LORD,

The honour your lordship has done me, by your notice and advice in yours of the 1st instant, I shall ever gratefully remember!

> Praise from thy lips 'tis mine with joy to boast,
> They best can give it who deserve it most.

Your lordship touches the darling chord of my heart, when you advise me to fire my muse at Scottish story, and Scottish scenes. I wish for nothing more than to make a leisurely pilgrimage through my native country; to sit and muse on those once hard-contended fields, where Caledonia, rejoicing, saw her bloody lion borne through broken ranks to victory and fame; and, catching the inspiration, to pour the deathless names in song. But, my Lord, in the midst of these enthusiastic reveries, a long-visaged, dry moral-looking phantom strides across my imagination, and pronounces these emphatic words:

"I, Wisdom, dwell with Prudence. Friend, I do not come to open the ill-closed wounds of your follies and misfortunes, merely to give you pain; I wish through these wounds to imprint a lasting lesson on your heart. I will not mention how many of my salutary advices you have despised: I have given you line upon line, and precept upon precept; and while I was chalking out to you the straight way to wealth and godly character, with audacious effrontery you have zigzagged across the path, contemning me to my face: you know the consequences. It is not yet three months since home was so hot for your stay that you were on the wing for the western side of the Atlantic, not to make a fortune, but to hide your disgrace.

"Now that your dear-loved Scotia, about whom you make such a racket, puts it in your power to return to the situation of your forefathers, will you follow these will-o'-wisp meteors of fancy and whim, till they bring you once more to the brink of ruin? I grant that the inmost ground you can occupy is but half a step from Want; but still it is half a step from it. If all that I can say is ineffectual, let her who seldom calls to you in vain, let the call of Pride prevail with you. You know how you feel at the iron gripe of ruthless oppression; you know how you bear the galling sneer of contumelious greatness. I hold you out the conveniences, the comforts of life, independence and character, on the one hand; I tender you servility, dependence, and wretchedness, on the other. I will not insult your common sense by bidding you make a choice."

This, my Lord, is an unanswerable harangue. I must return to my humble station, and woo my rustic muse in my wonted way at the plough-tail. Still, my Lord, while the drops of life warm my heart, gratitude to that dear-loved country in which I boast my birth, and gratitude to those of her distinguished sons, who have honoured me so much with their

said Robert Fergusson, and to keep up and preserve the same to his memory in all time coming. Extracted forth of the records of the Managers, by

WILLIAM SPROTT, *Clerk.*

Burns's poetical inscription for the tombstone will be found in vol. ii. p. 201. See also letter to Mr. Peter Stuart on next page.

[1] The Earl of Buchan, who was a patron of literature so far as parsimonious habits would permit him, and a dabbler in literature himself, seems to have been giving the poet what he no doubt deemed good advice. He was the elder brother of the witty Henry Erskine of the Scotch bar, and of Thomas Erskine of the English bar, who became lord-chancellor. He was vain and silly, and a good deal of a butt in the society of his compeers. He died in 1829, at an advanced age.—This letter with the above date first appeared in the *Bee* of April 27th, 1791. The text as it is printed in that periodical differs in some slight respects from that given above, which follows the holograph copy preserved in the British Museum.

patronage and approbation, shall, while stealing through my humble shades, ever distend my bosom, and at times, as now, draw forth the swelling tear.

R. B.

TO MR. PETER STUART,

EDITOR OF THE "STAR" NEWSPAPER, LONDON.

EDINBURGH, February, 1787.

MY DEAR SIR,

You may think, and too justly, that I am a selfish, ungrateful fellow, having received so many repeated instances of kindness from you, and yet never putting pen to paper to say thank you; but if you knew what a devil of a life my conscience has led me on that account, your good heart would think yourself too much avenged. By the bye, there is nothing in the whole frame of man which seems to be so unaccountable as that thing called Conscience. Had the troublesome yelping cur powers efficient to prevent a mischief, he might be of use; but at the beginning of the business, his feeble efforts are to the workings of passion, as the infant frosts of an autumnal morning to the unclouded fervour of the rising sun: and no sooner are the tumultuous doings of the wicked deed over, than, amidst the bitter native consequences of folly in the very vortex of our horrors, up starts Conscience, and harrows us with the feelings of the damned.

I have inclosed you, by way of expiation, some verse and prose, that, if they merit a place in your truly entertaining miscellany, you are welcome to. The prose extract is literally as Mr. Sprott sent it me.

The inscription on the stone is as follows:—

"HERE LIES ROBERT FERGUSSON, POET,

"Born, September 5th, 1751—Died, 16th October, 1774.

No sculptur'd marble here, nor pompous lay,
'No storied urn nor animated bust,'
This simple stone directs pale Scotia's way
To pour her sorrows o'er her poet's dust."

On the other side of the stone is as follows:—

"By special grant of the managers to Robert Burns, who erected this stone, this burial-place is to remain for ever sacred to the memory of Robert Fergusson."

R. B.

TO DR. MOORE.

EDINBURGH, 15th Feb. 1787.

SIR,

Pardon my seeming neglect in delaying so long to acknowledge the honour you have done me, in your kind notice of me, January 23rd. Not many months ago I knew no other employment than following the plough, nor could boast any thing higher than a distant acquaintance with a country clergyman. Mere greatness never embarrasses me; I have nothing to ask from the great, and I do not fear their judgment: but genius, polished by learning, and at its proper point of elevation in the eye of the world, this of late I frequently meet with, and tremble at its approach. I scorn the affectation of seeming modesty to cover self-conceit. That I have some merit I do not deny; but I see with frequent wringings of heart, that the novelty of my character, and the honest national prejudice of my countrymen, have borne me to a height altogether untenable to my abilities.

For the honour Miss Williams has done me, please, Sir, return her in my name my most grateful thanks. I have more than once thought of paying her in kind, but have hitherto quitted the idea in hopeless despondency. I had never before heard of her; but the other day I got her poems, which, for several reasons, some belonging to the head, and others the offspring of the heart, gave me a great deal of pleasure. I have little pretensions to critic lore; there are, I think, two characteristic features in her poetry—the unfettered wild flight of native genius, and the querulous, sombre tenderness of time-settled sorrow."

I only know what pleases me, often without being able to tell why.

R. B.[1]

[1] The following was Dr. Moore's answer to this letter:—

"CLIFFORD STREET, 28th Feb. 1787.

"DEAR SIR,

"Your letter of the 15th gave me a great deal of pleasure. It is not surprising that you improve in correctness and taste, considering where you have been for some time past. And I dare swear there is no danger of your admitting any polish which might weaken the vigour of your native powers.

"I am glad to perceive that you disdain the nauseous affectation of decrying your own merit as a

TO JOHN BALLANTINE, ESQ.

EDINBURGH, Feb. 24th, 1787.

MY HONOURED FRIEND,

I will soon be with you now, in guid black prent;—in a week or ten days at farthest. I am obliged, against my own wish, to print subscribers' names; so if any of my Ayr friends have subscription bills, they must be sent in to Creech directly. I am getting my phiz done by an eminent engraver,[1] and if it can be ready in time, I will appear in my book, looking like all other *fools* to my title-page. I have the honour to be ever your grateful

R. B.

poet, an affectation which is displayed with most ostentation by those who have the greatest share of self-conceit, and which only adds undeceiving falsehood to disgusting vanity. For you to deny the merit of your poems, would be arraigning the fixed opinion of the public.

"As the new edition of my *View of Society* is not yet ready, I have sent you the former edition, which I beg you will accept as a small mark of my esteem. It is sent by the sea to the care of Mr. Creech, and, along with these four volumes for yourself, I have also sent my *Medical Sketches* in one volume, for my friend Mrs. Dunlop of Dunlop: this you will be so obliging as to transmit, or, if you chance to pass soon by Dunlop, to give to her.

"I am happy to hear that your subscription is so ample, and shall rejoice at every piece of good fortune that befalls you. For you are a very great favourite in my family; and this is a higher compliment than perhaps you are aware of. It includes almost all the professions, and of course, is a proof that your writings are adapted to various tastes and situations. My youngest son, who is at Winchester school, writes to me, that he is translating some stanzas of your 'Hallowe'en' into Latin verse, for the benefit of his comrades. This union of taste partly proceeds, no doubt, from the cement of Scottish partiality, with which they are all somewhat tinctured. Even your translator, who left Scotland too early in life for recollection, is not without it.

"I remain, with great sincerity, your obedient servant,

"J. MOORE."

[1] This was Beugo, who engraved the first portrait of Burns, from the original painting by Nasmyth. Beugo did not keep strictly to the painting, but got the poet to sit to him while he was engraving, so that the plate differs somewhat from Nasmyth's portrait, displaying a swarthier and more melancholy countenance than the painter gave it. It was considered to be a better likeness.

TO THE HON. HENRY ERSKINE.[2]

EDINBURGH, February 1787.

SIR,

I showed the enclosed political ballad to my Lord Glencairn, to have his opinion whether I should publish it; as I suspect my political tenets, such as they are, may be rather heretical in the opinion of some of my best friends. I have a few first principles in Religion and Politics, which I believe I would not easily part with; but for all the etiquette of, by whom, in what manner, &c., I would not have a dissocial word with any of God's creatures, particularly an honoured patron or a respected friend. His lordship seems to think the piece may appear in print, but desired me to send you a copy for your suffrage. I am, with the sincerest gratitude for the notice with which you have been pleased to honour the rustic bard, Sir, your most devoted, humble servant,

R. B.

TO THE EARL OF GLENCAIRN.

EDINBURGH, Feb. 1787.

MY LORD,

I wanted to purchase a profile of your lordship, which I was told was to be got in town; but I am truly sorry to see that a blundering painter has spoiled a "human face divine." The enclosed stanzas I intended to have written below a picture or profile of your lordship, could I have been so happy as to procure one with any thing of a likeness.

As I will soon return to my shades, I wanted to have something like a material object for my gratitude; I wanted to have it in my power to say to a friend, there is my noble patron, my generous benefactor. Allow me, my lord, to publish these verses.[3] I con-

[2] To Harry Erskine, the learned and witty Dean of Faculty, Burns was introduced by the Earl of Glencairn, a cousin of the eminent lawyer. The political ballad referred to in the letter is that beginning

When Guilford good our pilot stood.

—Vol. i. p. 291.

[3] The verses beginning "Whose is that noble, dauntless brow." It does not appear that his lordship granted the poet's request, as the verses did not see the light till long after the poet and patron's death. They are given here in facsimile. See a later letter to this nobleman, of January, 1788.

jure your lordship, by the honest throe of gratitude, by the generous wish of benevolence, by all the powers and feelings which compose the magnanimous mind, do not deny me this petition. I owe much to your lordship: and, what has not in some other instances always been the case with me, the weight of the obligation is a pleasing load. I trust I have a heart as independent as your lordship's, than which I can say nothing more; and I would not be beholden to favours that would crucify my feelings. Your dignified character in life, and manner of supporting that character, are flattering to my pride; and I would be jealous of the purity of my grateful attachment, where I was under the patronage of one of the much-favoured sons of fortune.

Almost every poet has celebrated his patrons, particularly when they were names dear to fame, and illustrious in their country; allow me, then, my lord, if you think the verses have intrinsic merit, to tell the world how much I have the honour to be,

Your lordship's highly indebted, and ever grateful humble servant,

R. B.

TO GAVIN HAMILTON, ESQ.

EDINBURGH, March 8th, 1787.

DEAR SIR,

Yours came safe, and I am, as usual, much indebted to your goodness.—Poor Captain Montgomery is cast. Yesterday it was tried whether the husband could proceed against the unfortunate lover without first divorcing his wife, and their Gravities on the Bench were unanimously of opinion that Maxwell may prosecute for damages directly, and need not divorce his wife at all if he pleases; and Maxwell is immediately, before the Lord Ordinary, to prove, what I dare say will not be denied, the Crim. Con.—then their Lordships will modify the damages, which I suppose will be pretty heavy, as their Wisdoms have expressed great abhorrence of my gallant Right Worshipful Brother's conduct.[1]

O, all ye powers of love unfortunate, and friendless woe, pour the balm of sympathizing pity on the grief-torn, tender heart of the hapless Fair One!

My two songs on Miss W. Alexander and Miss Peggy Kennedy were likewise tried yesterday by a jury of literati, and found defamatory libels against the fastidious powers of Poetry and Taste; and the author forbidden to print them under pain of forfeiture of character. I cannot help almost shedding a tear to the memory of two songs that had cost me some pains, and that I valued a good deal, but I must submit.[2]

My most respectful compliments to Mrs. Hamilton and Miss Kennedy.—

My poor unfortunate Songs come again across my memory. D—n the pedant, frigid soul of Criticism for ever and ever! I am ever, dear Sir, your obliged

R. B.

TO MR. JAMES CANDLISH,[3]

STUDENT IN PHYSIC, GLASGOW COLLEGE.

EDINBURGH, March 21st, 1787.

MY EVER DEAR, OLD ACQUAINTANCE,

I was equally surprised and pleased at your letter, though I dare say you will think by my delaying so long to write to you that I am so drowned in the intoxication of good fortune as to be indifferent to old, and once dear connexions. The truth is, I was determined to write a good letter, full of argument, amplification, erudition, and, as Bayes says, *all that*. I thought of it, and thought of it, and, by my soul, I could not; and, lest you should mistake the cause of my silence, I just sit down to tell you so. Don't give yourself credit, though, that the strength of your logic scares me: the truth is, I never mean to meet you on that ground at all. You have shown me one thing which was to be demonstrated: that strong pride of reasoning, with a little affectation of

[1] Respecting this case see note to the fragment beginning "By all I loved neglected and forgot."

[2] The two songs alluded to are the "Lass o' Ballochmyle," and "Young Peggy blooms our bonniest lass;" and if Burns was not exaggerating here, we cannot help thinking that the verdict of the "jury of literati" errs on the side of severity.

[3] James Candlish was, like his correspondent, the son of obscure parents in Ayrshire, and appears to have become acquainted with the poet at the parish school of Dalrymple, and renewed their companionship for a short time at the Ayr grammar-school. See note to the "Belles of Mauchline," vol. i. p. 227.

FAC-SIMILE OF BURNS' HAND-WRITING.

FROM THE ORIGINAL FORMERLY IN POSSESSION OF MAJOR JAMES GLENCAIRN BURNS.

Verses intended to be written below a noble Earl's picture.

Whose is that noble, dauntless brow?
And whose that eye of fire?
And whose that generous, princely mien,
E'en rooted Foes admire?

Stranger, to justly shew that brow,
And mark that eye of fire,
Would take His hand, whose vernal tints,
His other Works admire.

And mark that eye of fire,
Would take His hand, whose vernal tints,
His other Works admire.

Bright as a cloudless Summer-sun,
With stately port he moves;
His guardian Seraph eyes with awe
The noble Ward he loves.

Among th' illustrious Scottish Sons
That Chief thou may'st discern,
Mark Scotia's fond returning eye,
It dwells upon Glencairn

singularity, may mislead the best of hearts. I likewise, since you and I were first acquainted, in the pride of despising old women's stories, ventured in "the daring path Spinoza trod;" but experience of the weakness, not the strength, of human powers, made me glad to grasp at revealed religion.

I must stop, but don't impute my brevity to a wrong cause. I am still, in the Apostle Paul's phrase, "The old man with his deeds," as when we were sporting about the "Lady Thorn." I shall be four weeks here yet at least; and so I shall expect to hear from you; welcome sense, welcome nonsense.

I am, with the warmest sincerity, my dear old friend, yours &c.,

R. B.

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

EDINBURGH, March 22d, 1787.

MADAM,

I read your letter with watery eyes. A little, very little, while ago, I had scarce a friend but the stubborn pride of my own bosom; now I am distinguished, patronized, befriended by you. Your friendly advices, I will not give them the cold name of criticisms, I receive with reverence. I have made some small alterations in what I before had printed. I have the advice of some very judicious friends among the literati here, but with them I sometimes find it necessary to claim the privilege of thinking for myself. The noble Earl of Glencairn, to whom I owe more than to any man, does me the honour of giving me his strictures: his hints, with respect to impropriety or indelicacy, I follow implicitly.

You kindly interest yourself in my future views and prospects; there I can give you no light. It is all

> Dark as was Chaos ere the infant sun
> Was roll'd together, or had tried his beams
> Athwart the gloom profound.

The appellation of a Scottish bard is by far my highest pride; to continue to deserve it is my most exalted ambition. Scottish scenes and Scottish story are the themes I could wish to sing. I have no dearer aim than to have it in my power, unplagued with the routine of business, for which heaven knows I am unfit enough, to make leisurely pilgrimages through Caledonia; to sit on the fields of her battles; to wander on the romantic banks of her rivers; and to muse by the stately towers or venerable ruins, once the honoured abodes of her heroes.

But these are all Utopian thoughts: I have dallied long enough with life; 'tis time to be in earnest. I have a fond, an aged mother to care for: and some other bosom ties perhaps equally tender. Where the individual only suffers by the consequences of his own thoughtlessness, indolence, or folly, he may be excusable; nay, shining abilities, and some of the nobler virtues, may half sanctify a heedless character; but where God and nature have intrusted the welfare of others to his care; where the trust is sacred, and the ties are dear, that man must be far gone in selfishness, or strangely lost to reflection, whom these connexions will not rouse to exertion.

I guess that I shall clear between two and three hundred pounds by my authorship; with that sum I intend, so far as I may be said to have any intention, to return to my old acquaintance, the plough, and, if I can meet with a lease by which I can live, to commence farmer. I do not intend to give up poetry; being bred to labour, secures me independence, and the Muses are my chief, sometimes have been my only enjoyment. If my practice second my resolution, I shall have principally at heart the serious business of life; but while following my plough, or building up my shocks, I shall cast a leisure glance to that dear, that only feature of my character, which gave me the notice of my country, and the patronage of a Wallace.

Thus, honoured Madam, I have given you the bard, his situation, and his views, native as they are in his own bosom.

R. B.

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

EDINBURGH, 15th April, 1787.

MADAM,

There is an affectation of gratitude which I dislike. The periods of Johnson and the pauses of Sterne may hide a selfish heart. For my part, Madam, I trust I have too much pride for servility, and too little prudence for

selfishness. I have this moment broken open your letter, but

> Rude am I in speech,
> And therefore little can I grace my cause
> In speaking for myself—

so I shall not trouble you with any fine speeches and hunted figures. I shall just lay my hand on my heart and say, I hope I shall ever have the truest, the warmest sense of your goodness.

I come abroad, in print, for certain on Wednesday. Your orders I shall punctually attend to; only, by the way, I must tell you that I was paid before for Dr. Moore's and Miss Williams' copies, through the medium of Commissioner Cochrane in this place, but that we can settle when I have the honour of waiting on you.

Dr. Smith[1] was just gone to London the morning before I received your letter to him.

R. B.

TO JOHN BALLANTINE, ESQ., AYR.

EDINBURGH, 18th April, 1787.

SIR,

I have taken the liberty to send a hundred copies of my book to your care.[2] . . . I trouble you then, Sir, to find a proper person (of the mercantile folks I suppose will be best) that, for a moderate consideration, will retail the books to subscribers as they are called for. Several of the subscription bills have been mislaid, so all who say they have subscribed must be served at subscription price; otherwise, those who have not subscribed must pay six shillings. Should more copies be needed, an order by post will be immediately answered.

My respectful compliments to Mr. Aiken.

[1] Adam Smith, LL.D., the author of the *Wealth of Nations*, &c.

[2] Though, as we see from the above, the new edition of the poems was ready for delivery on the 18th April, it was not formally published until the 21st. It took the form of a handsome octavo volume, and was sold to the subscribers at five shillings; non-subscribers had to pay a shilling extra. The first edition, consisting of 2800 copies, was speedily exhausted, and a second impression was thrown off. Within the year, the demand not being supplied, a third edition was produced in London by arrangement with Mr. Creech.

I wrote him by David Shaw, which I hope he received.

I have the honour to be, with the most grateful sincerity, Sir, your obliged and very humble servant,

R. B.

TO MR. GEORGE REID, BARQUHARIE,

WITH A PARCEL, CARE OF WM. RONALD, TOBACCONIST, MAUCHLINE.

EDINBURGH, 19th April, 1787.

MY DEAR SIR,

The fewer words I can tell my story in so much the better, as I am in an unco tirryfyke[3] of a hurry.

I have sent two copies of my book to you; one of them as a present to yourself, or rather, to your wife, the other present in my name to Miss Jenny. It goes to my heart that time does not allow me to make some very fine turned periods on the occasion, as I generally like pretty well to hear myself speak; at least, fully as well as anybody else.

Tell Miss Jenny that I had wrote her a long letter, wherein I had taken to pieces Rt. Honourables, Honourables, and Reverends not a few; but it, with many more of my written things were stolen from my room, which terrified me from "scauding my lips in ither folk's kail" again. By good luck, the fellow is gone to Gibraltar, and I trust in heaven he will go to the bottom for his pains. I will write you by post when I leave Auld Reekie, which will be in about ten days.

R. B.

TO DR. MOORE.

EDINBURGH, 23d April, 1787.

I received the books, and sent the one you mentioned to Mrs. Dunlop. I am ill skilled in beating the coverts of imagination for metaphors of gratitude. I thank you, Sir, for the honour you have done me; and to my latest hour will warmly remember it. To be highly pleased with your book, is what I have in common with the world; but to regard these volumes as a mark of the author's friendly esteem, is a still more supreme gratification.

[3] *Unco tirryfyke* = extraordinary bustle.

I leave Edinburgh in the course of ten days or a fortnight, and, after a few pilgrimages over some of the classic ground of Caledonia, Cowden Knowes, Banks of Yarrow, Tweed, &c., I shall return to my rural shades, in all likelihood never more to quit them. I have formed many intimacies and friendships here, but I am afraid they are all of too tender a construction to bear carriage a hundred and fifty miles. To the rich, the great, the fashionable, the polite, I have no equivalent to offer; and I am afraid my meteor appearance will by no means entitle me to a settled correspondence with any of you, who are the permanent lights of genius and literature.

My most respectful compliments to Miss Williams. If once this tangent flight of mine were over, and I were returned to my wonted leisurely motion in my old circle, I may probably endeavour to return her poetic compliment in kind.

R. B.[1]

[1] Dr. Moore's answer to the above was in the following terms:—

"CLIFFORD STREET, May 23, 1787.

DEAR SIR,

"I had the pleasure of your letter by Mr. Creech, and soon after he sent me the new edition of your poems. You seem to think it incumbent on you to send to each subscriber a number of copies proportionate to his subscription money, but you may depend upon it, few subscribers expect more than one copy, whatever they subscribed; I must inform you, however, that I took twelve copies for those subscribers, for whose money you were so accurate as to send me a receipt, and Lord Eglinton told me he had sent for six copies for himself, as he wished to give five of them as presents.

"Some of the poems you have added in this last edition are very beautiful, particularly the 'Winter Night,' the 'Address to Edinburgh,' 'Green grow the rashes,' and the two songs immediately following; the latter of which is exquisite. By the way, I imagine you have a peculiar talent for such compositions, which you ought to indulge. No kind of poetry demands more delicacy or higher polishing. Horace is more admired on account of his odes than all his other writings. But nothing now added is equal to your 'Vision,' and 'Cotter's Saturday Night.' In these are united fine imagery, natural and pathetic description, with sublimity of language and thought. It is evident that you already possess a great variety of expression and command of the English language; you ought therefore to deal more sparingly, for the future, in the provincial dialect—why should you, by using that, limit the number of your admirers to those who understand the Scottish, when you can extend it to all persons of taste who understand the English language? In my opinion you should plan some larger work than any you have as yet attempted. I mean, reflect upon some proper subject, and arrange the plan in your mind, without beginning to execute any part of it till you have studied most of the best English poets, and read a little more of history.—The Greek and Roman stories you can read in some abridgment, and soon become master of the most brilliant facts, which must highly delight a poetical mind. You should also, and very soon may, become master of the heathen mythology, to which there are everlasting allusions in all the poets, and which in itself is charmingly fanciful. What will require to be studied with more attention, is modern history; that is, the history of France and Great Britain, from the beginning of Henry the Seventh's reign. I know very well you have a mind capable of attaining knowledge by a shorter process than is commonly used, and I am certain you are capable of making a better use of it when attained than is generally done.

"I beg you will not give yourself the trouble of writing to me when it is inconvenient, and make no apology when you do write for having postponed it—be assured of this, however, that I shall always be happy to hear from you. I think my friend Mr. —— told me that you had some poems in manuscript by you of a satirical and humorous nature (in which, by the way, I think you very strong), which your prudent friends prevailed on you to omit; particularly one called 'Somebody's Confession' [probably 'Holy Willie's Prayer']; if you will intrust me with a sight of any of these, I will pawn my word to give no copies, and will be obliged to you for a perusal of them.

"I understand you intend to take a farm, and make the useful and respectable business of husbandry your chief occupation; this I hope will not prevent your making occasional addresses to the nine ladies who have shown you such favour, one of whom visited you in the 'auld clay biggin'.' Virgil, before you, proved to the world that there is nothing in the business of husbandry inimical to poetry: and I sincerely hope that you may afford an example of a good poet being a successful farmer. I fear it will not be in my power to visit Scotland this season; when I do I'll endeavour to find you out, for I heartily wish to see and converse with you. If ever your occasions call you to this place, I make no doubt of your paying me a visit, and you may depend on a very cordial welcome from this family. I am, dear Sir, your friend and obedient servant,

J. MOORE.

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

EDINBURGH, 30th April, 1787.

——Your criticisms, Madam, I understand very well, and could have wished to have pleased you better. You are right in your guess that I am not very amenable to counsel. Poets, much my superiors, have so flattered those who possessed the adventitious qualities of wealth and power, that I am determined

to flatter no created being, either in prose or verse.

I set as little by princes, lords, clergy, critics, &c. as all these respective gentry do by my bardship. I know what I may expect from the world, by and bye—illiberal abuse, and perhaps contemptuous neglect.

I am happy, Madam, that some of my own favourite pieces are distinguished by your particular approbation. For my "Dream," which has unfortunately incurred your loyal displeasure,[1] I hope in four weeks, or less, to have the honour of appearing, at Dunlop, in its defence in person.

R. B.

TO MR. WILLIAM DUNBAR, W.S.[2]

LAWNMARKET, Monday Morning,
[30th April, 1787.]

DEAR SIR,

In justice to Spenser, I must acknowledge that there is scarcely a poet in the language could have been a more agreeable present to me; and in justice to you, allow me to say, Sir, that I have not met with a man in Edinburgh to whom I would so willingly have been indebted for the gift. The tattered rhymes I herewith present you, and the handsome volumes of Spenser for which I am so much indebted to your goodness, may perhaps be not in proportion to one another; but be that as it may, my gift, though far less valuable, is as sincere a mark of esteem as yours.

The time is approaching when I shall return to my shades; and I am afraid my numerous Edinburgh friendships are of so tender a construction that they will not bear carriage with me. Yours is one of the few that I could wish of a more robust constitution. It is indeed very probable that when I leave this city, we part never more to meet in this sublunary sphere; but I have a strong fancy that in some future eccentric planet, the comet of happier systems than any with which astronomy is yet acquainted, you and I, among the harum scarum sons of imagination and whim, with a hearty shake of a hand, a metaphor, and a laugh, shall recognize old acquaintance:

> Where Wit may sparkle all its rays,
> Uncurst with Caution's fears;
> That Pleasure, basking in the blaze,
> Rejoice for endless years.

I have the honour to be, with the warmest sincerity, dear Sir, &c.,

R. B.

TO THE REV. DR. HUGH BLAIR.

LAWNMARKET,
EDINBURGH, 3d May, 1787.

REVEREND AND MUCH-RESPECTED SIR,

I leave Edinburgh to-morrow morning, but could not go without troubling you with half a line, sincerely to thank you for the kindness, patronage, and friendship you have shown me. I often felt the embarrassment of my singular situation; drawn forth from the veriest shades of life to the glare of remark; and honoured by the notice of those illustrious names of my country, whose works, while they are applauded to the end of time, will ever instruct and mend the heart. However the meteor-like novelty of my appearance in the world might attract notice, and honour me with the acquaintance of the permanent lights of genius and literature, those who are truly benefactors of the immortal nature of man, I knew very well that my utmost merit was far unequal to the task of preserving that character when once the novelty was over: I have made up my mind that abuse, or almost even neglect, will not surprise me in my quarters.

I have sent you a proof impression of Beugo's work for me, done on Indian paper, as a trifling but sincere testimony with what heart-warm gratitude I am, &c.[3]

R. B.

[1] Mrs. Dunlop had written the poet a letter containing comments on the new edition, and dwelling with particular emphasis on his reprinting "The Dream," which she thought would very probably damage the bard's future prospect.

[2] The colonel of the convivial club humorously yclept the Crochallan Fencibles. See note to song "Rattlin' Roarin' Willie."

[3] Dr. Blair responded to the above epistle in these terms:—

"ARGYLE-SQUARE, EDINBURGH, 4th May, 1787.

"DEAR SIR,

"I was favoured this forenoon with your very obliging letter, together with an impression of your portrait, for which I return you my best thanks. The success you have met with I do not think was beyond your merits; and if I have had any small hand in contributing to it, it gives me great pleasure. I

TO JAMES JOHNSON,

MUSIC ENGRAVER, EDINBURGH.[1]

LAWNMARKET,
Friday noon, 4th May, 1787.

DEAR SIR,

I have sent you a song never before known, for your collection; the air by Mr. Gibbon, but I know not the author of the words, as I got it from Dr. Blacklock.

Farewell, my dear Sir! I wished to have seen you, but I have been dreadfully throng, as I march to-morrow.—Had my acquaintance with you been a little older, I would have asked the favour of your correspondence; as I have met with few people whose company and conversation gave me so much pleasure, because I have met with few whose sentiments are so congenial to my own.

When Dunbar and you meet, tell him that I left Edinburgh with the idea of him hanging somewhere about my heart.

Keep the original of this song till we meet again, whenever that may be.

R. B.

know no way in which literary persons who are advanced in years can do more service to the world, than in forwarding the efforts of rising genius, or bringing forth unknown merit from obscurity. I was the first person who brought out to the notice of the world the poems of Ossian; first, by the *Fragments of Ancient Poetry*, which I published, and afterwards, by my setting on foot the undertaking for collecting and publishing the *Works of Ossian;* and I have always considered this as a meritorious action of my life.

"Your situation, as you say, was indeed very singular; and in being brought out, all at once, from the shades of deepest privacy to so great a share of public notice and observation, you had to stand a severe trial. I am happy that you have stood it so well; and as far as I have known or heard, though in the midst of many temptations, without reproach to your character and behaviour.

"You are now, I presume, to retire to a more private walk of life; and I trust will conduct yourself there with industry, prudence, and honour. You have laid the foundation for just public esteem. In the midst of those employments which your situation will render proper, you will not, I hope, neglect to promote that esteem, by cultivating your genius, and attending to such productions of it as may raise your character still higher. At the same time, be not in too great a haste to come forward. Take time and leisure to improve and mature your talents. For on any second production you give the world, your fate as a poet will very much depend. There is no doubt a gloss of novelty which time wears off. As you very properly hint yourself, you are not to be surprised, if in your rural retreat you do not find yourself surrounded with that glare of notice and applause which here shone upon you. No man can be a good poet without being somewhat of a philosopher. He must lay his account, that any one, who exposes himself to public observation, will occasionally meet with the attacks of illiberal censure, which it is always best to overlook and despise. He will be inclined sometimes to court retreat, and to disappear from public view. He will not affect to shine always; that he may at proper seasons come forth with more advantage and energy. He will not think himself neglected if he be not always praised. I have taken the liberty, you see, of an old man to give advice and make reflections, which your own good-sense will, I dare say, render unnecessary.

"As you mention your being just about to leave town, you are going, I should suppose, to Dumfriesshire, to look at some of Mr. Miller's farms. I heartily wish the offers to be made you there may answer; as I am persuaded you will not easily find a more generous and better hearted proprietor to live under than Mr. Miller. When you return, if you come this way, I will be happy to see you, and to know concerning your future plans of life. You will find me by the 22d of this month, not in my house in Argyle-square, but at a country house at Restalrig, about a mile east from Edinburgh, near the Musselburgh road. Wishing you all success and prosperity, I am, with real regard and esteem, dear Sir, yours sincerely,

"HUGH BLAIR."

[1] Shortly before the close of his first visit to Edinburgh, Burns made the acquaintance of Johnson. The engraver had commenced the preparation of the *Scots Musical Museum*, a large collection of national songs, with their airs harmonized for the pianoforte by Stephen Clarke, an Edinburgh organist, between whom and Burns afterwards sprang up a warm friendship. When Johnson's undertaking was brought under the poet's notice, he readily consented to assist in it. When the first volume appeared in May, 1787, it was found to contain two songs acknowledged by Burns—"Green grow the rashes," and "Young Peggy blooms our bonniest lass"—besides other two afterwards without much authority associated with his name—"The Joyful Widower," and "O whaur did ye get that Hauvermeal Bannock." David Laing in the preface to a new edition of the *Museum* superintended by him, and published by Blackwood and Sons in 1839, says:—"The *Musical Museum* was a work so congenial to the poet's mind, that it evidently had a decided effect in directing his efforts more exclusively to song writing. Burns, from the period of his acquaintance with Johnson, ought to be considered not merely as a contributor, but as the proper and efficient editor of the work. He not only contributed a large number of original songs, expressly written for it, but he applied to every person likely to render assistance, and whilst visiting different parts of the country, diligently gleaned fragments of old songs hitherto unpublished, which he completed with additional lines or stanzas as might be required."

TO THE EARL OF GLENCAIRN.

[LAWNMARKET, 4th May, 1787.]

MY LORD,

I go away to-morrow morning early; and allow me to vent the fulness of my heart in thanking your Lordship for all that patronage, that benevolence, and that friendship, with which you have honoured me. With brimful eyes I pray, that you may find in that Great Being, whose image you so nobly wear, that friend which I have found in you. My gratitude is not selfish design—that ! disdain—it is not dodging after the heels of greatness—that is an offering you disdain. It is a feeling of the same kind with my devotion.

R. B.

TO WILLIAM CREECH, ESQ.,

EDINBURGH.

SELKIRK, 13th May, 1787.

MY HONOURED FRIEND,

The enclosed I have just wrote, nearly extempore, in a solitary inn in Selkirk, after a miserable wet day's riding. I have been over most of East Lothian, Berwick, Roxburgh, and Selkirkshires; and next week I begin a tour through the north of England. Yesterday I dined with Lady Harriet, sister to my noble patron,[1] *Quem Deus conservet!* I would write till I would tire you as much with dull prose, as I daresay by this time you are with wretched verse, but I am jaded to death; so, with a grateful farewell,

I have the honour to be, good Sir, yours sincerely,

R. B.

Auld chuckie-Reekie's[2] sair distrest,
Down droops her ance weel-burnish'd crest,
Nae joy her bonnie buskit nest
Can yield ava,
Her darling bird that she lo'es best,
Willie's awa![3]

[1] James, Earl of Glencairn.

[2] Edinburgh.

[3] See the rest of this poem, and a notice of Creech, the poet's Edinburgh bookseller, at pages 211-213 vol. ii.

TO MR. PETER HILL,[4]

CARE OF MR. CREECH, BOOKSELLER, EDINBURGH.

[BERRY-WELL,] May 17th, 1787.

DEAR SIR,

If Mr. Alexr. Pattison, or Mr. Cowan, from Paisley, or in general, any other of those to whom I have sent copies on credit before, apply to you, you will give them what number they demand, when they require it, provided always that those who are non-subscribers shall pay one shilling more than subscribers. This I write to you when I am miserably "fou," consequently it must be the sentiments of my heart.

R. B.

TO MR. PATTISON, BOOKSELLER, PAISLEY.[5]

BERRY-WELL, NEAR DUNSE, May 17, 1787.

DEAR SIR,

I am sorry I was out of Edinburgh, making a slight pilgrimage to the classic scenes of this country, when I was favoured with yours of the 11th instant, enclosing an order of the Paisley Banking Company on the Royal Bank, for twenty-two pounds seven shillings sterling, payment in full, after carriage deducted, for ninety copies of my book I sent you. According to your motions, I see you will have left Scotland before this reaches you, otherwise I would send you "Holy Willie" with all my heart. I was so hurried that I absolutely forgot several things I ought to have minded, among the rest sending books to Mr. Cowan, but any order of yours will be answered at Creech's shop. You will please remember that non-subscribers pay six shillings, this is

[4] Hill was at this date Creech's principal assistant, and as he was of a cheerful social nature the poet and he soon were on terms of intimacy. About a year later Hill started in business on his own account, having as apprentice one who was to attain a wide fame in his profession—Archibald Constable. Hill had a successful career, and died at an advanced age in 1836.

[5] Mr. Pattison was a *manufacturer;* Burns playfully dubs him *Bookseller* because of his success in so rapidly disposing of so many copies of the new edition of the poems. See Clarinda Correspondence, Feb. 22, 1788, for a racy sketch of a day passed with Pattison.

Creech's profit; but those who have subscribed, though their names have been neglected in the printed list, which is very incorrect, they are supplied at the subscription price. I was not at Glasgow, nor do I intend for London; and I think Mrs. Fame is very idle to tell so many lies on a poor poet. When you or Mr. Cowan write for copies, if you should want any, direct to Mr. Hill at Mr. Creech's shop, and I write to Mr. Hill by this post, to answer either of your orders. Hill is Mr. Creech's first clerk, and Creech himself is presently in London. I suppose I shall have the pleasure against your return to Paisley, of assuring you how much I am, dear Sir, your obliged humble servant,

R. B.

TO MR. W. NICOL,[1]

MASTER OF THE HIGH SCHOOL, EDINBURGH.

CARLISLE, June 1, 1787.

KIND HONEST-HEARTED WILLIE,

I'm sitten down here, after seven and forty miles ridin', e'en as forjesket and forniaw'd as a forfoughten cock, to gie you some notion o' my land-lowper-like stravaguin sin' the sorrowfu' hour that I sheuk hands and parted wi' Auld Reekie.

My auld, ga'd gleyde o' a meere has huchyall'd up hill and down brae, in Scotland and England, as teuch and birnie as a vera devil wi' me.[2] It's true, she's as poor's a sang-maker, and as hard's a kirk, and tipper-taipers when she taks the gate, just like a lady's gentlewoman in a minuwae, or a hen on a het girdle; but she's a yauld, poutherie girran for a' that, and has a stomack like Willie Stalker's meere that wad ha'e disgeested tumbler-wheels, for she'll whip me aff her five stimparts o' the best aits at a down-sittin' and ne'er fash her thumb. When ance her ringbanes and spavies, her crucks and cramps, are fairly soupl'd, she beets to, beets to, and aye the hindmost hour the tightest. I could wager her price to a thretty pennies, that for twa or three wooks ridin' at fifty mile a-day, the deil-sticket o' five gallopers acqueesh Clyde and Whithorn could cast saut on her tail.

I hae dander'd owre a' the kintra frae Dumbar to Seleraig, and hae forgather'd wi' mony a guid fallow, and mony a weelfar'd hizzie. I met wi' twa dink quines in particlar, ane o' them a sonsie, fine, fodgel lass, baith braw and bonnie; the tither was a clean-shankit, straught, tight, weelfar'd winch, as blythe's a lintwhite on a flowerie thorn, and as sweet and modest's a new blawn plumrose in a hazle shaw. They were baith bred to mainers by the beuk, and onie ane o' them had as muckle smeddum and rumblegumtion as the half o' some presbytries that you and I baith ken. They play'd me sik a deevil o' a shavie that I daur say if my harigals were turn'd out, ye wad see twa nicks i' the heart o' me like the mark o' a kail-whittle in a castock.

I was gaun to write you a lang pystle, but, Gude forgie me, I gat mysel' sae notouriously bitchify'd the day after kail-time that I can hardly stoiter but and ben.

My best respecks to the guidwife and a' our common friens, especiall Mr. and Mrs. Cruikshank, and the honest guidman o' Jock's Lodge.

I'll be in Dumfries the morn, gif the beast be to the fore, and the branks bide hale.

Gude be wi' you, Willie! Amen.

R. B.[3]

[1] Some account of this crony of the poet's will be found in the Life and elsewhere. He died in 1797.

[2] This mare was the poet's favourite, Jenny Geddes, named after the woman memorable in Scottish tradition as the first who displayed a *physical force opposition* to the introduction of Episcopacy into Scotland, by flinging her stool at the Dean of Edinburgh's head, in St. Giles's Church, July 23, 1637, when he commenced to read the liturgy, exclaiming at the same time, "Villain! dost thou say the mass at my lug?"

[3] "No man had ever more command of this ancient Doric dialect than Burns. He has left a curious testimony of his skill in a letter to Mr. Nicol, an attempt to read a sentence of which would break the teeth of most modern Scotchmen."—SIR WALTER SCOTT.—— All the versions of this amusing letter that we have seen differ from each other in various small points. Our version is substantially Cromek's, who was the first to print the letter. The following may be given as a translation of it in English:—

"I've sat down here, after seven-and-forty miles' riding, e'en as fatigued and tired out as a cock spent with fighting, to give you some notion of my vagabond-like wanderings since the sorrowful hour that I shook hands and parted with Auld Reekie [Edinburgh].

"My old, galled screw of a mare has hobbled up hill and down hill, in Scotland and England, as tough

TO MR. JAMES SMITH,

AT MILLAR AND SMITH'S OFFICE, LINLITHGOW.

MAUCHLINE, 11th June, 1787.

MY DEAR SIR,

I date this from Mauchline, where I arrived on Friday evening last. I slept at John Dow's, and called for my daughter; Mr. Hamilton and family; your mother, sister, and brother; my quondam Eliza, &c., all—all well. If anything had been wanting to disgust me completely at Armour's family, their mean servile compliance would have done it. Give me a spirit like my favourite hero, Milton's Satan:

> Hail, horrors! hail,
> Infernal world! and thou, profoundest hell,
> Receive thy new possessor! one who brings
> A mind not to be chang'd by *place* or *time!*

I cannot settle to my mind.—Farming—the only thing of which I know any thing, and Heaven above knows but little do I understand even of that, I cannot, dare not risk on farms as they are. If I do not fix, I will go for Jamaica. Should I stay, in an unsettled state at home, I would only dissipate my little fortune, and ruin what I intend shall compensate my little ones for the stigma I have brought on their names.

I shall write you more at large soon; as this letter costs you no postage, if it be worth reading you cannot complain of your pennyworth.

I am ever, my dear Sir, yours,

R. B.

P.S. The cloot[1] has unfortunately broke, but I have provided a fine buffalo horn, on which I am going to affix the same cipher which you will remember was on the cloot.

TO MR. WILLIAM NICOL,

EDINBURGH.

MAUCHLINE, June 18, 1787.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I am now arrived safe in my native country, after a very agreeable jaunt, and have the pleasure to find all my friends well. I breakfasted with your grey-headed, reverend friend, Mr. Smith; and was highly pleased both with the cordial welcome he gave me, and his most excellent appearance and sterling good sense.

I have been with Mr. Miller at Dalswinton, and am to meet him again in August. From my view of the lands, and his reception of my bardship, my hopes in that business are rather mended; but still they are but slender.

I am quite charmed with Dumfries folks—Mr. Burnside, the clergyman, in particular, is a man whom I shall ever gratefully remember; and his wife, Gude forgie me! I had almost broke the tenth commandment on her account. Simplicity, elegance, good sense, sweetness of disposition, good humour, kind hospitality, are the constituents of her manner and lively as a very devil with me. It's true she's as poor as a song-maker, and as hard's a church, and steps along gingerly when she takes the road, just like a lady's gentlewoman in a minuet or a hen on a hot gridiron; but she's a vigorous, spirited nag for all that, and has a stomach like Willie Stalker's mare, that would have digested cart-wheels, for she'll whip me off her five-eighths of a bushel of the best oats at a single feed and never put herself about in the least. When once her ring-bones and spavins, her stiff joints and cramps are fairly suppled she gets better and better, and is always the last hour the smartest. I could wager her price to twopence halfpenny that for two or three weeks' riding at fifty miles a day devil a one of any five gallopers between Clyde and Whithorn could cast salt on her tail.

"I have gone leisurely over all the country from Dunbar to Selkirk, and have come across many a good fellow and many a well-favoured lass. I met with two neat girls in particular, one of them a jolly, fine, plump lass, both well dressed and pretty; the other was a clean-limbed, straight, tight, good-looking wench, as blithe's a linnet on a flowery thorn, and as sweet and modest's a new-blown primrose in a hazel grove. They were both bred to manners by the book, and any one of them had as much shrewdness and intelligence as the half of some presbyteries that you and I both know. They played me such a devil of a trick that I daresay if my pluck were turned out you would see two nicks in the heart of me like the mark of a kitchen-knife on a cabbage-stalk.

"I was going to write you a long epistle, but, God forgive me, I got myself so notoriously drunk to-day after dinner-time that I can hardly stagger from one end of the house to the other.

"My best respects to your good lady and all our common friends, especially Mr. and Mrs. Cruikshank and the honest goodman of Jock's Lodge.

"I'll be in Dumfries to-morrow if the beast be alive and the bridle keep whole. God be with you, Willie! Amen."

[1] *Cloot*=hoof; of polished sheep-cloots snuff "mulls" (boxes) were frequently made.

and heart; in short—but if I say one word more about her, I shall be directly in love with her.

I never, my friend, thought mankind very capable of anything generous; but the stateliness of the patricians in Edinburgh, and the servility of my plebeian brethren (who perhaps formerly eyed me askance) since I returned home, have nearly put me out of conceit altogether with my species. I have bought a pocket Milton, which I carry perpetually about with me, in order to study the sentiments—the dauntless magnanimity, the intrepid, unyielding independence, the desperate daring, and noble defiance of hardship, in that great personage, SATAN. 'Tis true, I have just now a little cash; but I am afraid the star that hitherto has shed its malignant, purpose-blasting rays full in my zenith: that noxious planet so baneful in its influences to the rhyming tribe, I much dread it is not yet beneath the horizon.—Misfortune dodges the path of human life; the poetic mind finds itself miserably deranged in, and unfit for the walks of business; add to all, that thoughtless follies and hare-brained whims, like so many *ignes fatui*, eternally diverging from the right line of sober discretion, sparkle with step bewitching blaze in the idly-gazing eyes of the poor heedless bard, till, pop, "he falls like Lucifer, never to hope again." God grant that this may be an unreal picture with respect to me! but should it not, I have very little dependence on mankind. I will close my letter with this tribute my heart bids me pay you—the many ties of acquaintance and friendship which I have, or think I have, in life, I have felt along the lines, and, damn them, they are almost all of them of such frail contexture, that I am sure they would not stand the breath of the least adverse breeze of fortune; but from you, my ever dear Sir, I look with confidence for the Apostolic love that shall wait on me "through good report and bad report"—the love which Solomon emphatically says "is strong as death." My compliments to Mrs. Nicol, and all the circle of our common friends.

R. B.

P.S. I shall be in Edinburgh about the latter end of July.

TO ROBERT AINSLIE, ESQ.[1]

ARROCHAR, BY LOCH LONG
28th June, 1787.

MY DEAR SIR,

I write this on my tour through [illegible]ntry where savage streams tumble ove[illegible]avage

[1] The numerous letters written by Burns to this gentleman (of which the above is the first), entitle him to particular notice here. It is a circumstance which speaks loudly in behalf of Mr. Ainslie, that though he had just completed his twentieth year, he recommended himself to an intimate friendship with such a man as Burns, who was also seven or eight years his senior. This friendship was formed in Edinburgh, in the spring of 1787, and seems to have shot up with that tropical rapidity of growth which belongs to generous natures.

Robert Ainslie was the eldest son of a gentleman who resided at Berrywell, near Dunse, in the capacity of land-agent for Lord Douglas over his lordship's Berwickshire estates. The poet has described the Ainslie family in the memoranda of his southern tour. (See vol. i. p. 176.) Robert Ainslie served his apprenticeship, as a writer to the signet, with Mr. Samuel Mitchelson, in Carrubber's Close, Edinburgh, the gentleman at whose house Smollett in his *Humphrey Clinker* represents the Bramble household as having first tasted a haggis. His acquaintance with Burns was formed while still an apprentice. In the course of the same year (1787) and in the beginning of 1788, while Burns continued to reside at Edinburgh, he had frequent meetings with Mr. Ainslie; and after his departure from the capital, he wrote many confiding letters to his young friend only some of which have been preserved. They also met once at Ellisland, where the poet gave him a written copy of his "Tam o' Shanter," which Mr. Ainslie afterwards presented to Sir Walter Scott. Before this visit Mr. Ainslie had in 1789 become a member of the Society of Writers to the Signet, and commenced business in Edinburgh, prosecuting this calling with success. By a lady named Cunningham, the daughter of a colonel of the Scots brigade in the Dutch service, he became the father of a numerous family. He died in 1838, in the seventy-second year of his age. Mr. Ainslie had at all times of his life a taste for literature, and could write well, whether to a humorous or a grave purpose. Of the former class of his compositions, some papers in the *Edinburgh Magazine* for 1824, on the reform of the Scottish judicatories, may be cited. Two little volumes, respectively entitled *A Father's Gift to his Children* and *Reasons for the Hope that is in Us*, both embodying the evidences for Christianity, are the principal examples of his grave style. These belong to his later years, when no doubt he would look back with regret on such youthful errors as that referred to in the letter of 23d August following. There is some evidence to show that latterly his attitude towards Burns was somewhat colder than in the early period of their friendship. See letter in Clarinda Correspondence, pp. 287–8.

mountains, thinly overspread with savage flocks, which starvingly support as savage inhabitants. My last stage was Inverary—to-morrow night's stage Dumbarton. I ought sooner to have answered your kind letter, but you know I am a man of many sins.

R. B.

TO MR. JAMES SMITH,

LINLITHGOW.

[MOSSGIEL?], June 30th, 1787.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

. . . On our return, at a Highland gentleman's hospitable mansion, we fell in with a merry party, and danced till the ladies left us, at three in the morning. Our dancing was none of the French or English insipid formal movements; the ladies sung Scotch songs like angels, at intervals; then we flew at Bab at the Bowster, Tullochgorum, Loch Erroch Side,[1] &c., like midges sporting in the mottie sun, or craws prognosticating a storm in a hairst [harvest] day.—When the dear lasses left us, we ranged round the bowl till the good-fellow hour of six; except a few minutes that we went out to pay our devotions to the glorious lamp of day peering over the towering top of Benlomond. We all kneeled; our worthy landlord's son held the bowl; each man a full glass in his hand; and I, as priest, repeated some rhyming nonsense, like Thomas-a-Rhymer's prophecies I suppose.—After a small refreshment of the gifts of Somnus, we proceeded to spend the day on Lochlomond,[2] and reach Dumbarton in the evening. We dined at another good fellow's house, and, consequently, pushed the bottle; when we went out to mount our horses, we found ourselves "No vera fou but gaylie yet." [Not very tipsy but pretty well.] My two friends and I rode soberly down the Loch side, till by came a Highlandman at a gallop, on a tolerably good horse, but which had never known the ornaments of iron or leather. We scorned to be out-galloped by a Highlandman, so off we started, whip and spur. My companions, though seemingly gaily mounted, fell sadly astern; but my old mare, Jenny Geddes, one of the Rosinante family, she stralned past the Highlandman in spite of all his efforts with the hair halter: just as I was passing him, Donald wheeled his horse, as if to cross before me to mar my progress, when down came his horse, and threw his rider's breekless a—e in a clipt hedge: and down came Jenny Geddes over all, and my bardship between her and the Highlandman's

[1] Scotch dance-tunes.

[2] This Queen of the Scottish lakes is situated chiefly in the county of Dumbarton, a small portion only belonging to Stirlingshire, which forms the greater part of its eastern boundary. Placed at the southern extremity of the Grampian range, it is inclosed everywhere except towards the south by lofty hills, the chief of which, Benlomond, rises beside its east shore to the height of 3192 feet above the ordinary level of its waters. The lake is about twenty-two miles long, and about eight in breadth towards the south; but the northern moiety, confined between opposing hills, is for the most part only one mile in breadth. Fed at the north extremity by a small river flowing through Glenfalloch, it receives several mountain streams from the west, and on the east the Stirlingshire river Endrick. At the south point its waters form the river Leven, so celebrated by means of the beautiful ode of Smollett, a native of its banks. This natural drain of the lake has a channel of only about six miles, during which it descends about twenty feet: it joins the Clyde beneath the walls of Dumbarton Castle. Lochlomond contains ten islands of considerable size, and more than that number of lesser isles, the greater number of both kinds being situated in the southern and more spacious part of the expanse. The depth of the lake is very various. In the southern part it seldom exceeds twenty fathoms; in the northern, where it is narrow and bounded closely by steep mountains, it is much greater, reaching over a hundred. In point of picturesque beauty Lochlomond is probably surpassed by few lakes in Europe. It comprehends almost every variety of landscape, from the softest to the most savage and magnificent. In the southern and broader part the wooded shores and islands, in association with the smooth expanse of water, afford a prospect of the richest beauty; while more to the north, the lofty mountains, precipitous and in some places naked of soil and vegetation, convey impressions of the utmost grandeur. Its various charms have been the admiration of travellers since ever fine landscape began to be admired in Scotland; and small steamers daily, during the summer months, convey tourists from the lower to the upper extremity. The road from Glasgow to Inverary, passing along the west shore affords other means of inspecting the beauties of Lochlomond. It was by this road that Burns came down to Dumbarton. When the preceding letter was written he was at Arrochar at the head of Loch Long, distant about a mile and a half from Tarbert on Lochlomond. Benlomond is the most prominent mountain in most views of the lake. The lake abounds in delicious trout. Nothing more is known of this tour of Burns than what he tells in his letters here. A memento of his visit to Inverary exists in the epigram on p. 213 of vol. ii.

horse. Jenny Geddes trode over me with such cautious reverence, that matters were not so bad as might well have been expected; so I came off with a few cuts and bruises, and a thorough resolution to be a pattern of sobriety for the future.

I have yet fixed on nothing with respect to the serious business of life. I am, just as usual, a rhyming, mason-making, raking, aimless, idle fellow. However, I shall somewhere have a farm soon. I was going to say, a wife too; but that must never be my blessed lot. I am but a younger son of the house of Parnassus, and like other younger sons of great families, I may intrigue, if I choose to run all risks, but must not marry.

I am afraid I have almost ruined one source, the principal one indeed, of my former happiness—that eternal propensity I always had to fall in love. My heart no more glows with feverish rapture. I have no paradisaical evening interviews, stolen from the restless cares and prying inhabitants of this weary world. I have only . . . . This last is one of your distant acquaintances, has a fine figure, and elegant manners; and in the train of some great folks whom you know, has seen the politest quarters in Europe. I do like her a deal; but what piques me is her conduct at the commencement of our acquaintance. I frequently visited her when I was in [Edinburgh?], and after passing regularly the intermediate degrees between the distant formal bow and the familiar grasp round the waist, I ventured, in my careless way, to talk of friendship in rather ambiguous terms; and after her return to [Harvieston?],[1] I wrote to her in the same style. Miss, construing my words farther I suppose than even I intended, flew off in a tangent of female dignity and reserve, like a mounting lark in an April morning; and wrote me an answer which measured me out very completely what an immense way I had to travel before I could reach the climate of her favour. But I am an old hawk at the sport, and wrote her such a cool, deliberate, prudent reply,[2] as brought my bird from her aërial towerings, pop down at my foot, like Corporal Trim's hat.

As for the rest of my acts, and my wars, and all my wise sayings, and why my mare was called Jenny Geddes, they shall be recorded in a few weeks hence at Linlithgow, in the chronicles of your memory, by

R. B.

[1] The blanks have been filled up on the supposition that the lady referred to may have been Peggy Chalmers; but this is far from certain.

[2] On this letter Mr. R. L. Stevenson, in an article on "Some Aspects of Robert Burns," originally contributed to the *Cornhill Magazine*, has the following comments:—"In June we find him back in Manchline, a famous man. There the Armour family greeted him with a 'mean servile compliance,' which increased his former disgust. Jean was not less compliant; a second time the poor girl submitted to the fascination of the man whom she did not love, and whom she had so cruelly insulted little more than a year ago; and though Burns took advantage of her weakness, it was in the ugliest and most cynical spirit, and with a heart absolutely indifferent. Judge of this by a letter, written some twenty days after his return; a letter, to my mind, among the most degrading of the collection; a letter which seems to have been inspired by a boastful libertine bagman. 'I am afraid,' it goes, 'I have almost ruined one source, the principal one indeed, of my former happiness—that eternal propensity I have to fall in love. My heart no more glows with feverish rapture. I have no paradisaical evening interviews.' Even the process of 'battering' [Burns elsewhere speaks of 'battering himself into a passion'] has failed him, you perceive. Still he had some one in his eye; a lady, if you please, with 'a fine figure and elegant manners,' and who had 'seen the politest quarters in Europe.'" After giving the rest of this paragraph Mr. Stevenson adds:—"I avow a carnal longing after this transcription to buffet the Old Hawk about the ears. There is little question that to this lady he must have repeated his addresses, and that he was by her (Miss Chalmers) eventually, though not at all unkindly, rejected."

TO MR. JOHN RICHMOND.

MOSSGIEL, 7th July, 1787.

MY DEAR RICHMOND,

I am all impatience to hear of your fate since the old confounder of right and wrong has turned you out of place, by his journey to answer his indictment at the bar of the other world.[3] He will find the practice of the court so different from the practice in which he has for so many years been thoroughly hackneyed, that his friends, if he had any connections truly of that kind, which I rather doubt, may well tremble for his sake. His chicane, his left-handed wisdom, which stood so firmly by him, to such good purpose, here, like other

[3] An allusion to the recent death of the lawyer in whose office Richmond had been employed as a clerk.

accomplices in robbery and plunder, will, now the piratical business is blown, in all probability turn king's evidence, and then the devil's bagpiper will touch him off "Bundle and go!"

If he has left you any legacy, I beg your pardon for all this; if not, I know you will swear to every word I said about him.

I have lately been rambling over by Dumbarton and Inverary, and running a drunken race on the side of Loch Lomond with a wild Highlandman;[1] his horse, which had never known the ornaments of iron or leather, zigzagged across before my old spavin'd hunter, whose name is Jenny Geddes, and down came the Highlandman, horse and all, and down came Jenny and my bardship; so I have got such a skinful of bruises and wounds, that I shall be at least four weeks before I dare venture on my journey to Edinburgh.

Not one new thing under the sun has happened in Mauchline since you left it. I hope this will find you as comfortably situated as formerly, or, if heaven pleases, more so; but at all events, I trust you will let me know of course how matters stand with you, well or ill. 'Tis but poor consolation to tell the world when matters go wrong; but you know very well your connection and mine stands on a different footing.

I am ever, my dear friend, yours,

R. B.

TO ROBERT AIKEN, ESQ., AYR.

MAUCHLINE [14th July, 1787].

MY HONOURED FRIEND,

The melancholy occasion of the foregoing poem[2] affects not only individuals but a country. That I have lost a friend, is but repeating after Caledonia. This copy, rather an incorrect one, I beg you will accept till I have an opportunity in person, which I expect to have on Tuesday first, of assuring you how sincerely I ever am, honoured Sir, your oft obliged,

R. B.

MR. HAMILTON'S OFFICE, *Saturday Evening.*

[1] This frolic, with its disastrous result, is more fully described in the previous letter.

[2] The "Elegy on the Death of Sir James Hunter Blair."

TO MR. PETER HILL, EDINBURGH.

MAUCHLINE, 19th July, 1787.

DEAR SIR,

I have just got a letter from Scot the bookbinder, where he tells me he needs a little money at present. I have written him to call on you; and I beg you will pay him his account, or give him part-payment as you see proper.

When Mr. Creech returns, I beg you will let me know by first convenient post. I am, dear Sir, your very humble servant,

R. B.

TO ROBERT AINSLIE.

MAUCHLINE, 23d July, 1787.

MY DEAR AINSLIE,

There is one thing for which I set great store by you as a friend, and it is this, that I have not a friend upon earth, besides yourself, to whom I can talk nonsense without forfeiting some degree of his esteem. Now, to one like me, who never cares for speaking any thing else but nonsense, such a friend as you is an invaluable treasure. I was never a rogue, but have been a fool all my life; and, in spite of all my endeavours, I see now plainly that I shall never be wise. Now it rejoices my heart to have met with such a fellow as you, who, though you are not just such a hopeless fool as I, yet I trust you will never listen so much to the temptations of the devil as to grow so very wise that you will in the least disrespect an honest fellow because he is a fool. In short, I have set you down as the staff of my old age, when the whole list of my friends will, after a decent share of pity, have forgot me.

> Though in the morn come sturt and strife,
> Yet joy may come at noon;
> And I hope to live a merry merry life
> When a' thir days are done. these

Write me soon, were it but a few lines just to tell me how that good sagacious man, your father,[3] is,—that kind dainty body, your mother,—that strapping chiel, your brother Douglas—and my friend Rachel, who is as far

[3] The members of this family are briefly sketched in Burns's Border Tour. See vol. i. p. 176.

before Rachel of old as she was before her blear-eyed sister Leah.

R. B.

[This letter should have been followed by the poet's famous autobiographical letter to Dr. John Moore, dated Mauchline, 2nd August, 1787. As it is only nominally a letter, however, being really a sketch of the writer's life up to the date of writing, we have given it immediately after Lockhart's Life in vol. i.]

TO MR. ARCHIBALD LAWRIE.

EDINBURGH, 14th August, 1787.

MY DEAR SIR,

Here am I——that is all I can tell you of that unaccountable being, myself. What I am doing no mortal can tell; what I am thinking, I myself cannot tell; what I am usually saying, is not worth telling. The clock is just striking one, two, three, four, —, —, —, —, —, —, —, twelve, forenoon; and here I sit in the attic story, *alias* the garret, with a friend on the right hand of my standish—a friend whose kindness I shall largely experience at the end of this line—there—thank you—a friend my dear Mr. Lawrie, whose kindness often makes me blush; a friend who has more of the milk of human kindness than all the human race put together, and what is highly to his honour, peculiarly a friend to the friendless as often as they come in his way; in short, Sir, he is, without the least alloy, a universal philanthropist; and his much beloved name is—a bottle of good old Port! In a week, if whim and weather serve, I shall set out for the north—a tour to the Highlands.

I ate some Newhaven broth, in other words, boiled mussels, with Mr. Farquhar's family, t'other day. Now I see you prick up your ears. They are all well, and Mademoiselle is particularly well. She begs her respects to you all; along with which please present those of your humble servant. I can no more. I have so high a veneration, or rather idolatrisation, for the cleric character, that even a little *futurum esse vel fuisse Priestling*, in his *Penna, pennae, pennae*, &c., throws an awe over my mind in his presence, and shortens my sentences into single ideas.

Farewell, and believe me to be ever, my dear Sir, yours,

R. B.

TO MR. ROBERT AINSLIE, JUN.

BERRYWELL, DUNSE.

EDINBURGH, 23d August, 1787.

As I gaed up to Dunse,
To warp a pickle yarn,
Robin, silly body,
He gat me wi' bairn.

From henceforth, my dear Sir, I am determined to set off with my letters like the periodical writers, viz., prefix a kind of text, quoted from some classic of undoubted authority, such as the author of the immortal piece of which my text is a part. What I have to say on my text is exhausted in chatter I wrote you the other day, before I had the pleasure of receiving yours from Inverleithen; and sure never was anything more lucky, as I have but the time to write this, that Mr. Nicol on the opposite side of the table takes to correct a proof sheet of a thesis. They are gabbling Latin so loud that I cannot hear what my own soul is saying in my own skull, so must just give you a matter-of-fact sentence or two, and end, if time permit, with a verse *de rei generatione*.

To-morrow I leave Edinburgh in a chaise:[1] Nicol thinks it more comfortable than horseback, to which I say Amen; so Jenny Geddes goes home to Ayrshire, to use a phrase of my mother's, "wi' her finger in her mouth."

Now for a modest verse of classical authority:—

The cats like kitchen,[2]
The dogs like broo;[3]
The lasses like the lads weel,
And th' auld wives too.

CHORUS.

And we're a' noddin',
Nid, nid, noddin',
We're a' noddin' fou at e'en.

If this does not please you, let me hear from you: if you write any time before the first of

[1] The poet was just about to start on his Highland tour, particulars of which will be found in vol. i.

[2] Anything eaten with bread, as beef, fish, cheese, &c.

[3] Broth, soup, or the like.

September, direct to Inverness, to be left at the post-office till called for; the next week at Aberdeen; the next at Edinburgh.

The sheet is done, and I shall just conclude with assuring you that I am, and ever with pride shall be, my dear Sir, yours, &c.

Call your boy what you think proper, only interject BURNS. What say you to a scripture name; for instance, Zimri Burns Ainslie, or Achitophel, &c., &c.; look your Bible for these two heroes. If you do this, I will repay the compliment.[1]

R. B.

TO ST. JAMES'S LODGE, TARBOLTON.

EDINBURGH, 23d Aug. 1787.

MEN AND BRETHREN,

I am truly sorry it is not in my power to be at your quarterly meeting. If I must be absent in body, believe me I shall be present in spirit. I suppose those who owe us monies, by bill or otherwise, will appear——I mean those we summoned. If you please, I wish you would delay prosecuting defaulters till I come home. The court is up, and I will be home before it sits down. In the meantime, to take a note of who appear, and who do not, of our faulty debtors, will be right in my humble opinion; and those who confess debt and crave days, I think we should spare them. Farewell!

[1] Judging from the tone of this letter we are inclined to doubt whether Burns was in all respects the best of friends for such a young man as Ainslie, on whose illegitimate son he here desires his name to be bestowed. The following statement of Robert Chambers's does not tend to lessen this doubt. "During this very month, while preparing for a tour amongst the nobles of the land, he was assailed with a repetition of the legal proceedings which had sent him into hiding a twelvemonth before, though regarding a different person—a fact substantiated beyond doubt by a document, dated the 15th of August, liberating him from the restraints of a writ *in meditatione fugæ*. This document he had himself preserved, and probably carried about with him for sometime, so that it had been liable to be used as a piece of spare paper for memoranda of his own. Most characteristically it contains, scribbled with a pencil in his own hand, a couple of verses of an old indecorously comical song." With such an illustrious and case-hardened fellow-sinner as Burns for his friend, it seems hardly likely that Ainslie would be troubled with any very serious "compunctious visitings" for his errors.

Within your dear mansion may wayward Contention,
And withered Envy ne'er enter;
May Secrecy round be the mystical bound,
And Brotherly Love be the centre.

R. B.

TO THE FREE MASONS OF ST. JAMES LODGE,
care of H. MANSON, TARBOLTON.

TO MR. ROBERT MUIR.

STIRLING, 26th August, 1787.

MY DEAR SIR,

I intended to have written you from Edinburgh, and now write you from Stirling to make an excuse. Here am I, on my way to Inverness, with a truly original, but very worthy man, a Mr. Nicol, one of the masters of the High-school in Edinburgh. I left Auld Reekie yesterday morning, and have passed, besides by-excursions, Linlithgow, Borrowstounness, Falkirk, and here am I undoubtedly. This morning I knelt at the tomb of Sir John the Graham, the gallant friend of the immortal Wallace; and two hours ago I said a fervent prayer for old Caledonia over the hole in a blue whinstone, where Robert de Bruce fixed his royal standard on the banks of Bannock Burn; and just now, from Stirling Castle,[2] I have seen by the setting sun the glorious prospect of the windings of Forth through the

[2] Stirling and its castle are of great but unknown antiquity. The latter was an important fortress in the days of Bruce, when it was besieged by Edward I. in person, and reduced with great difficulty. During the reigns of "the Jameses" it was the favourite seat of Scottish royalty. In a room which still exists, James II., in 1452, stabbed the Earl of Douglas with his own hand, from rage at his refusing to give up a league which he had formed against the government. James III. erected a parliament-hall and a chapel-royal, the former of which still remains. James V. was reared in this castle, under the care of Sir David Lyndsay, and, in mature life, added to the former building the still-existing palace, a building of rather fantastic architecture, described below. Queen Mary also spent a portion of her youthful years in Stirling castle. Her son, James VI., who was baptized here, resided in the palace, with his preceptor, Buchanan, during the whole of his minority. Seated on a lofty mass of basalt, in the centre of a wide plain, with an ample river flowing beneath, and an amphitheatre of magnificent hills in the distance, Stirling Castle has an attraction for the lovers of the picturesque such as few places in Scotland can boast of. About three miles almost directly south from Stirling is the site of the battle of Bannockburn, fought, Monday, June 24th, 1314.

rich carse of Stirling, and skirting the equally rich carse of Falkirk. The crops are very strong, but so very late that there is no harvest, except a ridge or two perhaps in ten miles, all the way I have travelled from Edinburgh.

I left Andrew Bruce[1] and family all well. I will be at least three weeks in making my tour, as I shall return by the coast, and have many people to call for.

My best compliments to Charles [Samson], our dear kinsman and fellow-saint; and Messrs. W. and H. Parkers. I hope Hughoe [Parker] is going on and prospering with God and Miss M'Causlin.

If I could think on any thing sprightly, I should let you hear every other post; but, a dull, matter-of-fact business like this scrawl, the less and seldomer one writes, the better.

Among other matters-of-fact I shall add this, that I am and ever shall be, my dear Sir, your obliged,

R. B.

TO GAVIN HAMILTON, ESQ.

STIRLING, 28th August, 1787.

MY DEAR SIR,

Here am I on my way to Inverness. I have rambled over the rich, fertile carses of Falkirk and Stirling, and am delighted with their appearance: richly waving crops of wheat, barley, &c., but no harvest at all yet, except in one or two places, an old-wife's ridge. Yesterday morning I rode from this town up the meandering Devon's banks, to pay my respects to some Ayrshire folks at Harvieston. After breakfast, we made a party to go and see the famous Caudron-linn, a remarkable cascade in the Devon, about five miles above Harvieston; and after spending one of the most pleasant days I ever had in my life, I returned to Stirling in the evening.[2] They are a family Sir, though I had not had any prior tie; though they had not been the brother and sisters of a certain generous friend of mine, I would never forget them. I am told you have not seen them these several years, so you can have very little idea of what these young folks are now. Your brother[3] is as tall as you are, but slender rather than otherwise; and I have the satisfaction to inform you that he is getting the better of those consumptive symptoms which I suppose you know were threatening him. His make, and particularly his manner, resemble you, but he will still have a finer face. (I put in the word *still*, to please Mrs. Hamilton.) Good sense, modesty, and at the same time a just idea of that respect that man owes to man, and has a right in his turn to exact, are striking features in his character; and, what with me is the Alpha and the Omega, he has a heart that might adorn the breast of a poet! Grace has a good figure, and the look of health and cheerfulness, but nothing else remarkable in her person. I scarcely ever saw so striking a likeness as is between her and your little Beenie; the mouth and chin particularly. She is reserved at first; but as we grew better acquainted, I was delighted with the native frankness of her manner, and the sterling sense of her observation. Of Charlotte I cannot speak in common terms of admiration: she is not only beautiful but lovely. Her form is elegant; her features not regular, but they have the smile of sweetness and the settled complacency of good nature in the highest degree; and her complexion, now that she has happily recovered her wonted health, is equal to Miss Burnet's. After the exercises of our riding to the Falls, Charlotte was exactly Dr. Donne's mistress:—

> Her pure and eloquent blood
> Spoke in her cheeks, and so distinctly wrought,
> That one would almost say her body thought.

[1] A shopkeeper on the North Bridge, Edinburgh, to whom Burns on his arrival in the city requested his letters to be addressed. He was probably a native of Kilmarnock.

[2] A second excursion to Harvieston which Burns made in October 1787, in company with Dr. Adair, gave him a better introduction to the well-known series of natural curiosities which mark the course of the little river Devon, in Clackmannanshire. Dr. Adair's account of this trip with the poet is given in the appendix to Lockhart's Life in vol. i. of this work. As elsewhere explained, Harvieston was the residence of relatives and connections of Gavin Hamilton (see vol. ii. pp. 231 232). Burns has sung of the Devon in several of his poems, especially those beginning, "How pleasant the banks of the clear winding Devon," and, "Fairest maid on Devon's banks, crystal Devon, winding Devon." The scenery of the Caldron Linn and the Rumbling Bridge is celebrated throughout Scotland.

[3] Half-brother was the real relationship.

Her eyes are fascinating; at once expressive of good sense, tenderness, and a noble mind.

I do not give you all this account, my good Sir, to flatter you. I mean it to reproach you. Such relations the first peer in the realm might own with pride; then why do you not keep up more correspondence with these so amiable young folks? I had a thousand questions to answer about you. I had to describe the little ones with the minuteness of anatomy. They were highly delighted when I told them that John[1] was so good a boy, and so fine a scholar, and that Willie[2] was going on still very pretty: but I have it in commission to tell her from them that beauty is a poor silly bauble without she be good. Miss Chalmers I had left in Edinburgh, but I had the pleasure of meeting with Mrs. Chalmers, only Lady Mackenzie[3] being rather a little alarmingly ill of a sore throat somewhat marred our enjoyment.

I shall not be in Ayrshire for four weeks. My most respectful compliments to Mrs. Hamilton, Miss Kennedy,[4] and Dr. Mackenzie. I shall probably write him from some stage or other.

I am ever, Sir, yours most gratefully,

R. B.

TO MR. JAMES BURNESS,

MONTROSE.

INVERNESS, 4th Sept. 1787.

DEAR COUSIN,

I wrote you from Edinburgh that I intended being north. I shall be in Stonehive[5] sometime on Monday the 10th inst., and I beg the favour of you to meet me there. I understand there is but one inn at Stonehive, so you cannot miss me. As I am in the country I certainly shall see any of my father's relations that are any way near my road; but I do not even know their names, or where one of them lives, so I hope you will meet me and be my guide. Farewell! till I have the pleasure of meeting you.[6]

I am ever, dear Sir, yours,

R. B.

TO WILLIAM INGLIS, ESQ.,

INVERNESS.

ETTLES HOTEL, Tuesday Evening.

Mr. Burns presents his most respectful compliments to Mr. Inglis,—would have waited on him with the enclosed,[7] but is jaded to death with the fatigue of the day's journey—won't leave Inverness till Thursday morning.

TO MR. JOSIAH WALKER,

BLAIR OF ATHOLE.[8]

INVERNESS, 5th Sept. 1787.

MY DEAR SIR,

I have just time to write the foregoing,[9] and to tell you that it was, at least the most part of it, the effusion of a half-hour I spent at Bruar. I do not mean it was *extempore*, for I have endeavoured to brush it up as well as Mr. Nicol's chat and the jogging of the chaise would allow. It eases my heart a good deal, as rhyme is the coin with which a poet pays his debts of honour or gratitude. What I owe

[1] This is the "wee curlie John," mentioned in the "Dedication to Gavin Hamilton."

[2] Wilhelmina Hamilton (then nine years old), afterwards wife of the Rev. John Tod of Mauchline.

[3] A daughter of Mrs. Chalmers, and therefore a sister of Miss (Peggy) Chalmers, Burns's friend and correspondent.

[4] Sister of Mrs. Gavin Hamilton.

[5] Stonehaven. Burns's spelling is a compromise between the correct and the local pronunciation Steenhive.

[6] It will be seen from the poet's journal (published in the Appendix to Lockhart's Life) that Mr. Burness met his now famous cousin as requested and introduced him to several of his relatives.

[7] This was a letter of introduction to Mr. Inglis (then provost of the burgh) from the poet's friend "Colonel" William Dunbar, W.S.

[8] Mr. Josiah Walker was at this time tutor in the family of the Duke of Athole. He had formed the acquaintance of Burns in Edinburgh, where he and the poet met frequently at Dr. Blacklock's, Professor Stewart's, and other houses. In 1815 he was nominated, through the interest of the Athole family, Professor of Humanity (Latin) in the University of Glasgow. He died in 1831. He was author of a poem entitled, "The Defence of Order," published about the beginning of the present century, which was severely handled in the *Edinburgh Review;* and of a life of Burns, published in Morison's edition of the poet's works (Edin. 1811, 2 vols.), which is no less severely handled by Professor Wilson, in the essay accompanying the present edition.

[9] Viz. the "Humble Petition of Bruar Water."

to the noble family of Athole, of the first kind, I shall ever proudly boast; what I owe of the last, so help me God in my hour of need! I shall never forget.

The "little angel-band!"[1] I declare I prayed for them very sincerely to-day at the Fall of Fyers. I shall never forget the fine family-piece I saw at Blair; the amiable, the truly noble duchess, with her smiling little seraph in her lap, at the head of the table: the lovely "olive plants," as the Hebrew bard finely says, round the happy mother: the beautiful Mrs. Grahame;[2] the lovely, sweet Miss Catheart,[2] &c. I wish I had the powers of Guido to do them justice! My Lord Duke's kind hospitality—markedly kind indeed. Mr. Graham of Fintray's charms of conversation—Sir W. Murray's friendship. In short, the recollection of all that polite, agreeable company raises an honest glow in my bosom.

R. B.

TO MR. JAMES BURNESS, MONTROSE.

TOWNFIELD [MONTROSE, 13 Sept. 1787],
six o'clock morning.

MY DEAR COUSIN,

Mr. Nicol and Mr. Carnegie have taken some freak in their head, and have wakened me just now with the rattling of the chaise to carry me to meet them at Craigie to go on our journey some other road, and breakfast by the way. I must go, which makes me very sorry. I beg my kindest, best compliments to your wife and all the good friends I saw yesternight. Write me to Edinburgh in this week with a direction for your nephew in Glasgow. Direct to me—care of Mr. Creech, Edinburgh—I am ever, my dear Cousin,—Yours truly,

R. B.

[1] The "little angel-band" consisted of Lady Charlotte Murray, aged twelve, afterwards Lady Menzies of Castle Menzies; Lady Amelia, aged seven, afterwards Viscountess Strathallan; and Lady Elizabeth, an infant of five months, afterwards Lady Macgregor Murray of Lanrick.

[2] Mrs. Grahame and Miss Catheart were daughters of Lord Catheart, and sisters of the Duchess of Athole. The whole of the three fair sisters went to the "silent land" even before their short-lived eulogist. The husband of the first-mentioned lady was General Thomas Grahame, the hero of Barrosa, afterwards created a peer by the title of Lord Lynedoch.

TO MR. GILBERT BURNS.

EDINBURGH, 17th Sept. 1787.

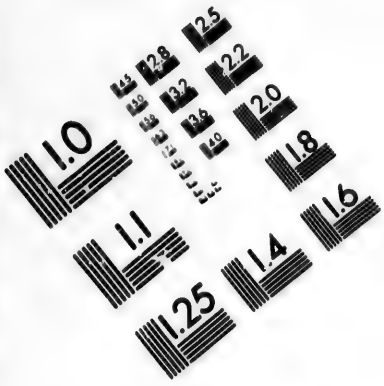
MY DEAR SIR,[3]

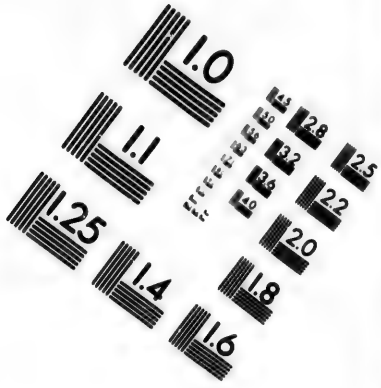
I arrived here safe yesterday evening, after a tour of twenty-two days, and travelling near six hundred miles, windings included. My farthest stretch was about ten miles beyond Inverness. I went through the heart of the Highlands by Crieff, Taymouth, the famous seat of Lord Breadalbane, down the Tay, among cascades and druidical circles of stones, to Dunkeld, a seat of the Duke of Athole; thence across Tay, and up one of his tributary streams to Blair of Athole, another of the duke's seats, where I had the honour of spending nearly two days with his grace and family: thence many miles through a wild country among cliffs grey with eternal snows and gloomy savage glens, till I crossed Spey and went down the stream through Strathspey, so famous in Scottish music; Badenoch, &c. till I reached Grant Castle, where I spent half a day with Sir James Grant and family; and then crossed the country for Fort George, but called by the way at Cawdor, the ancient seat of Macbeth; there I saw the identical bed in which tradition says king Duncan was murdered; lastly, from Fort George to Inverness.

I returned by the coast, through Nairn, Forres, and so on to Aberdeen, thence to Stonehive, where James Burness, from Montrose, met me by appointment. I spent two days among our relations, and found our aunts, Jean and Isabel, still alive, and hale old women.[4] John Caird, though born the same year with our father, walks as vigorously as I can: they have had several letters from his son in New York. William Brand is likewise a stout old fellow: but further particulars I delay till I see you, which will be in two or three weeks. The rest of my stages are not worth rehearsing; warm as I was for Ossian's country, where I had seen his very grave, what cared I for fishing towns or fertile carses? I slept at the famous Brodie of Brodie's one night, and dined at Gordon Castle next day, with the duke,

[3] "This," naturally enough remarks Robert Chambers, "appears a singular term for Burns to have employed in addressing his brother, but so it is in the original manuscript."

[4] As to the Kincardinshire relatives of the poet see "Paternal Ancestry of Burns," vol. i. p. 170.





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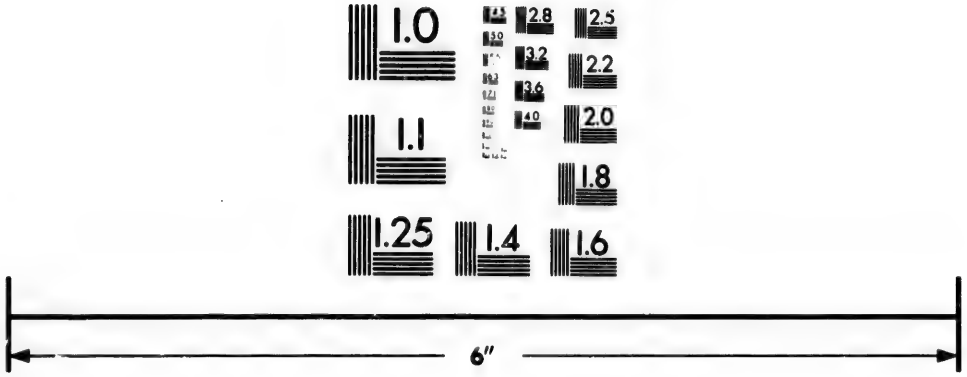

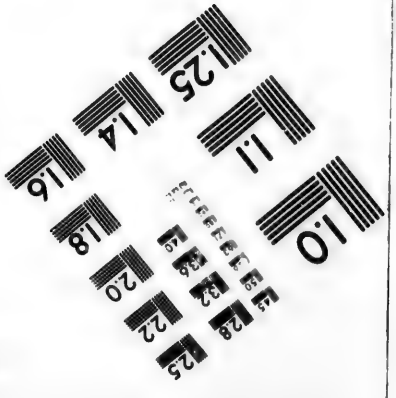

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duchess, and family. I am thinking to cause my old mare to meet me, by means of John Ronald, at Glasgow; but you shall hear farther from me before I leave Edinburgh. My duty and many compliments from the north to my mother; and my brotherly compliments to the rest. I have been trying for a berth for William, but am not likely to be successful. Farewell.

R. B.

TO MR. JAMES BURNESS, MONTROSE.

EDINBURGH, 19th Sept. 1787.

MY DEAR SIR,

I send you along with this nine copies[1] which you will transmit as marked on the blank leaves. The one to Lord Gardenstone you will transmit as soon as possible. Your hints about young Hudson I shall carefully remember when I call for him.

Anything you send me, direct to the care of Mr. Andrew Bruce, Merchant, Bridge St., Edinburgh, but I am afraid that your kind offer of the dry fish will cost more than they are worth to carriers. My compliments to your wife and all friends, and excuse this brevity in,——Yours ever,

R. B.

TO PATRICK MILLER, ESQ.,

DALSWINTON.

EDINBURGH, 28th September, 1787.

SIR

I have been on a tour through the Highlands, and arrived in town but the other day, so could not wait on you at Dalswinton about the latter end of August, as I had promised and intended.[2]

Independent of any views of future connections, what I owe you for the past, as a friend and benefactor (when friends I had few, and benefactors I had none), strongly in my bosom prohibits the most distant instance of ungrateful disrespect. I am informed you do not come to town for a month still, and within that time I shall certainly wait on you, as by this time I suppose you will have settled your scheme with respect to your farms.

My journey through the Highlands was perfectly inspiring, and I hope I have laid in a good stock of poetical ideas from it. I shall make no apology for sending the enclosed: it is a small but grateful tribute to the memory of our common countryman.[3]—I have the honour to be, with the most grateful sincerity, Sir, your most obliged humble servant,

R. B.

P.S.—I have added another poem,[4] partly as it alludes to some folks nearly and dearly connected with Ayrshire, and partly as rhymes are the only coin in which the poor poet can pay his debts of gratitude. The lady alluded to is Miss Isabella M'Leod, aunt to the young Countess of Loudoun.

As I am determined not to leave Edinburgh till I wind up my matters with Mr. Creech, which I am afraid will be a tedious business, should I unfortunately miss you at Dalswinton, perhaps your factor will be able to inform me of your intentions with respect to the Elesland [Ellisland] farm, which will save me a jaunt to Edinburgh again.

There is something so suspicious in the profession of attachment from a little man to a great man, that I know not how to do justice to the grateful warmth of my heart, when I would say how truly I am interested in the welfare of your little troop of angels, and how much I have the honour to be again, Sir, your obliged humble servant,

R. B.

TO WILLIAM NICOL, EDINBURGH.

AUCHTERTYRE, Monday, [15th Oct. 1787].

MY DEAR SIR,

I find myself very comfortable here, neither oppressed by ceremony, nor mortified by

[1] Copies of the Edinburgh edition of his poems.

[2] As may be seen from a letter to William Nicol of June 18th, Burns had paid a visit to Mr. Miller at Dalswinton about that date, to arrange about leasing a farm. He had promised to return in August in order to look more carefully over the farms, but, as we are aware from his movements, he was unable to fulfil this engagement.

[3] The "Elegy on the Death of Sir James Hunter Blair." Sir James, like Mr. Miller and the poet, was a native of Ayrshire, hence the term "our common countryman."

[4] The verses on the "Death of John M'Leod, Esq."

neglect. Lady Augusta is a most engaging woman, and very happy in her family, which makes one's outgoings and incomings very agreeable.[1] I called at Mr. Ramsay's of Auchtertyre as I came up the country, and am so delighted with him that I shall certainly accept of his invitation to spend a day or two with him as I return.[2] I leave this place on Wednesday or Thursday.

Make my kind compliments to Mr. and Mrs. Cruikshank and Mrs. Nicol, if she is returned.

I am ever, dear Sir, your deeply indebted,

R. B.

TO WILLIAM CRUIKSHANK,[3]

ST. JAMES'S SQUARE, EDINBURGH.

AUCHTERTYRE, Monday, [15th Oct. 1787].

I have nothing, my dear Sir, to write to you, but that I feel myself exceedingly comfortably situated in this good family: just notice enough to make me easy but not to embarrass me. I was storm-staid two days at the foot of the Ochill-hills, with Mr. Tait of Herveyston and Mr. Johnston of Alva, but was so well pleased that I shall certainly spend a day on the banks of the Devon as I return. I leave this place I suppose on Wednesday, and shall devote a day to Mr. Ramsay at Auchtertyre, near Stirling: a man to whose worth I cannot do justice. My respectful kind compliments to Mrs. Cruikshank, and my dear little Jeanie,[4] and if you see Mr. Masterton, please remember me to him.

I am ever, my dear Sir, &c.,

R. B.

[1] The short and pleasant visit here alluded to was one he paid to Sir William Murray of Ochtertyre, in Strathearn, Perthshire, whom the bard had met at Blair-Athole House, and who had given him a cordial invitation to visit him. Lady Augusta, wife of Sir William—a fine-looking woman in the maturity of her charms—was a daughter of the insurgent Earl of Cromarty, who so narrowly escaped the fate of Lords Kilmarnock and Balmerino, on the Tower Hill in 1746. Among the inmates of Ochtertyre House was Miss Euphemia Murray, a cousin of his host, who inspired the song, "Blythe, Blythe, and Merry was she." During this stay, too, were written the lines "On scaring some Water Fowl in Loch-Turit."

[2] Mr. Ramsay, of Ochtertyre on the Teith, was, says Robert Chambers, "a noted specimen of the scholarly country gentleman of the last age, living in Horatian ease and unpretending simplicity on his paternal acres. He had a great love of Scottish literature and history, and thus was eminently disposed to admire and sympathize with Burns." As elsewhere explained, there are two places of the name of Ochtertyre or Auchtertyre.

[3] One of the masters of the High School, Edinburgh, with whom Burns lodged for a season while residing in the Scottish capital. We have had occasion, in previous notes, to allude to this friend.

TO PATRICK MILLER, ESQ.,

DALSWINTON.

EDINBURGH, 20th October, 1787.

SIR,

I was spending a few days at Sir William Murray's, Auchtertyre, and did not get your obliging letter till to-day I came to town. I was still more unlucky in catching a miserable cold, for which the medical gentlemen have ordered me into close confinement "under pain of death"—the severest of penalties. In two or three days, if I get better, and if I hear at your lodgings that you are still at Dalswinton, I will take a ride to Dumfries directly. From something in your last, I would wish to explain my idea of being your tenant. I want to be a farmer in a small farm, about a plough-gang, in a pleasant country, under the auspices of a good landlord. I have no foolish notion of being a tenant on easier terms than another. To find a farm where one can live at all is not easy—I only mean living soberly like an old-style farmer, and joining personal industry. The banks of the Nith are as sweet poetic ground as any I ever saw; and besides, Sir, 'tis but justice to the feelings of my own heart, and the opinion of my best friends, to say that I would wish to call you landlord sooner than any landed gentleman I know. These are my views and wishes; and whatever way you think best to lay out your farms, I shall be happy to rent one of them. I shall certainly be able to ride to Dalswinton about the middle of next week, if I hear you are not gone. I have the honour to be, Sir, your obliged humble servant,

ROBT. BURNS.

[4] The "Very Young Lady" to whom he addressed some verses, and of whom he sung, under the name of "The Rose-bud."

TO JAMES HOY, ESQ.,

GORDON CASTLE.

EDINBURGH, 30th October, 1787.

SIR,

I will defend my conduct in giving you this trouble, on the best of Christian principles—"Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them."—I shall certainly, among my legacies, leave my latest curse to that unlucky predicament which hurried—tore me away from Castle Gordon.[1] May that obstinate son of Latin prose [Nicol] be curst to Scotch mile periods, and damned to seven league paragraphs; while declension and conjugation, gender, number, and tense, under the ragged banners of dissonance and disarrangement, eternally rank against him in hostile array!

Allow me, Sir, to strengthen the small claim I have to your acquaintance, by the following request. An engraver, James Johnson, in Edinburgh, has, not from mercenary views, but from an honest Scotch enthusiasm, set about collecting all our native songs and setting them to music; particularly those that have never been set before. Clarke, the well-known musician, presides over the musical arrangement, and Drs. Beattie and Blacklock, Mr. Tytler of Woodhouselee, and your humble servant to the utmost of his small power, assist in collecting the old poetry, or sometimes for a fine air make a stanza when it has no words. The brats, too tedious to mention, which claim a parental pang from my bardship, I suppose will appear in Johnson's second number—the first was published before my acquaintance with him. My request is—"Cauld Kail in Aberdeen" is one intended for this number, and I beg a copy of his Grace of Gordon's words to it, which you were so kind as to repeat to me. You may be sure we won't prefix the author's name, except you like, though I look on it as no small merit to this work, that the names of so many of the authors of our old Scottish songs, names almost forgotten, will be inserted. I do not well know where to write to you—I rather write at you; but if you will be so obliging, immediately on receipt of this, as to write me a few lines, I shall perhaps pay you in kind, though not in quality. Johnson's terms are:—each number a handsome pocket volume, to consist at least of a hundred Scotch songs, with basses for the harpsichord, &c. The price to subscribers 5*s.*; to non-subscribers 6*s.* He will have three numbers I conjecture.

My direction for two or three weeks will be at Mr. William Cruikshank's, St. James's Square, New Town, Edinburgh. I am, Sir, yours to command,

R. B.[2]

[1] See note to p. 225, vol. ii., where a description of Gordon Castle is given, and also an account of the cause which hurried Burns from its hospitable roof.

TO REV. JOHN SKINNER.[3]

EDINBURGH [October 25th, 1787].

REVEREND AND VENERABLE SIR,

Accept, in plain dull prose, my most sincere thanks for the best poetical compliment I ever

[2] Mr. Hoy replied to the above letter in the following terms:

"GORDON CASTLE, Oct. 31st, 1787.

"SIR:

"If you were not sensible of your fault as well as of your loss, in leaving this place so suddenly, I should condemn you to starve upon *cauld kail* for *ae towmont* at least; and as for *Dick Latine* [Mr. Nicol], your travelling companion, without banning him *wi' a'* the curses contained in your letter (which he'll *no* value a *bawbee*) I should give him nought but *Stra'bogie castocks* to chew for *sax ouks*, or aye until he was as sensible of his error as you seem to be of yours.

* * * * *

"Your song ['Castle Gordon'] I showed without producing the author, and it was judged by the duchess to be the production of Dr. Beattie. I sent a copy of it, by her grace's desire, to a Mrs. M'Pherson in Badenoch, who sings 'Morag' and all other Gaelic songs in great perfection. I have recorded it likewise, by Lady Charlotte's desire, in a book belonging to her ladyship; where it is in company with a great many other poems and verses, some of the writers of which are no less eminent for their political than for their poetical abilities. When the duchess was informed that you were the author, she wished you had written the verses in Scotch.

"Any letter directed to me here will come to hand safely; and, if sent under the duke's cover, it will likewise come free; that is, as long as the duke is in this country.

"I am, Sir, yours sincerely,

"JAMES HOY."

[3] Mr. Skinner, the pastor of a numerous flock of Scottish Episcopalians at Longside, near Peterhead, was the author of the excellent popular song to the tune of "Tullochgorum," the "Ewie wi' the Crooked Horn," "John of Badenyon," and some others greatly

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received. I assure you, Sir, as a poet, you have conjured up an airy demon of vanity in my fancy, which the best abilities in your other capacity would be ill able to lay. I regret, and while I live I shall regret, that when I was in the north, I had not the pleasure of paying a younger brother's dutiful respect to the author of the best Scotch song ever

in vogue, and which display all the spirit of the olden muse of Scotland. To Burns these were verses as familiar as household words, and when, during his tour in the north of Scotland, he learned from his correspondent's son, Bishop Skinner of Aberdeen, that he had passed within a few miles of the residence of their author, he expressed the greatest regret for not having been aware of the circumstance, as he would have willingly gone twenty out of his way to see him. His regrets were mentioned to the venerable poet, and the consequence was the following poetical epistle from the latter to Burns, which produced the above letter.

POETICAL EPISTLE TO BURNS,
BY THE
REV. JOHN SKINNER.

O happy hour for evermair,
That led my chill up Chalmer's[1] stair, son
And gae him, what he values sair, much
Sae braw a skance sight
Of Ayrshire's dainty poet there,
By lucky chance.

Wae's my auld heart I was na wi' you,
Tho' worth your while I could na gie you,
But sin' I had na hap to see you
When ye was north,
I'm bauld to send my service to you
Hyne o'er the Forth. far

Sae proud's I am that ye hae heard
O' my attempts to be a Bard,
And think my muse nae that ill-fawrd ill-favoured
Seil o' your face! blessing
I wad na wiss for mair reward wish
Than your good grace.

Your bonny beukie, line by line little book
I've read, and think it freely fine;
Indeed I winna ca't *divine*, will not
As others might;
For that, ye ken, frae pen like mine,
Wad no be right.

But, by my sang, I dinna wonner, do not wonder
That ye've admirers, mony hun'er,
Let gowkit fleeps pretend to skunner stupid creatures
And tak offence; loathe
Ye've mathing said that leuks like blun'er looks
To fowk o' sense.

Your pauky "Dream" has humour in't, sly
I never saw the like in print;
The Birth-day Laurit durst na mint insinuate
As ye hae dane;
And yet there's nae a single hint
Can be ill ta'en.

[1] David Chalmers, the printer of the *Aberdeen Journal*, in whose house Burns met his correspondent's chill (son), Bishop Skinner.

Your "Maillie," and your guid "Auld Mare,"
And "Hallow-even's" funny cheer;
There's nane that reads them, far nor near,
But reezes Robie, praises
And thinks them as diverting gear matter
As Yorick's Tobie.

But, O! the weel-tauld "Cotter's Night" well-told
Is what gies me the maist delight—
A piece sae finished, and sae tight!
There's nane o's a'
Con'd preachment-timmer cleaner dight -timber wipe
In kirk nor ha'.

But what needs this or that to name?
It's own'd by a' there's nae a theme
Ye tak in hand, but's a' the same,
And nae ane o' them
But weel may challenge a' the fame
That we can gie them.

For me, I heartily allow you
The warld o' praise sae justly due you;
And but a Plowman! Sall I trow you? believe
Gin it be sae, if
A miracle I will avow you,
Deny't wha may!

Sae what avails a leash o' lair, freedom of learning
Thro' seven lang years, and some guid mair; even more
Whan plowman-lad, wi' nature bare
Sae far surpasses
A' we can do wi' study sair sore
To climb Parnassus?

But, thanks to praise, ye're i' your prime,
And may chant on this lang, lang time;
For, lat me tell you, 'tware a crime
To haud your tongue, hold
Wi' sic a knack's ye hae at rhyme, such
And you sae young.

Ye ken it's nae for ane like me
To be sae droll as ye can be:
But ony help that I can gie,
Tho't be but sma',
Your least command, I'se lat you see,
Sall gar me draw. shall make

An hour or sae by hook or crook,
And may be twa, some orrow onk odd week
That I can spare frae haly beuk, holy book
(For that's my hobby,)
I'll slip awa' to some by-neuk, -nook
And crack wi' Robie. chat

Wad ye but only crack again,
Just what ye like, in ony strain,
I'll tak it kind; for, to be plain,
I do expect it;
And, mair than that, I'll no be fain pleased
Gin ye neglect it. if

To Linshart, gin my hame ye spier, ask
Whare I hae heft near fifty year, dwelt

Scotland saw—"Tullochgorum's my delight!" The world may think slightly of the craft of song-making, if they please, but, as Job says—"O that mine adversary had written a book!"—let them try. There is a certain something in the old Scotch songs, a wild happiness of thought and expression, which peculiarly marks them, not only from English songs, but also from the modern efforts of song-wrights, in our native manner and language. The only remains of this enchantment, these spells of the imagination, rest with you. Our true brother, Ross of Lochlee,[1] was like-

'Twill come in course, ye need na fear;
The pairt's weel kent; pairt's well known
And postage, be it cheap or dear
I'll pay content.

Now, after a', hae me excuses'd excused
For wissing nae to be refees'd; refused
I dinna covet to be reez'd praised
For this feel lilt; foolish piece of rhyme.
But feel or wise, gin ye be pleas'd, if
Ye're welcome till't. to it

Sae, canty Plowman, fare ye weel; jolly
Lord bless ye lang wi' hae and heil, having and health
And keep you aye the honest chiel fellow
That ye hae been;
Syne lift you to a better biel then shelter
Whan this is deen! done

POSTSCRIPT.

This auld Scots muse I've courted lang,
And spar'd nae pains to win her;
Dowf tho' I be in rustic sang, dull
I'm no a late beginner.
But now auld age taks dowie turns, sad
Yet troth, as I'm a sinner,
I'll aye be fond of ROBIE BURNS,
While I can sign

JOHN SKINNER.

LISSHART, Sept. 25th, 1787.

Mr. Skinner was born at Balfour, Aberdeenshire, in October, 1721, where, under his father, then schoolmaster of the parish of Birse, he, at a very early period, displayed uncommon ability, particularly for acquiring a knowledge of the Latin language. Having finished his academical studies at Marischal College, Aberdeen, he soon after became assistant to the schoolmaster of Monymusk. Here it was that, enjoying in the house of Monymusk every advantage for prosecuting his studies and improving his mind in the attainment of useful learning, together with the benefit of reading under the direction of a worthy Episcopal clergyman in that neighbourhood, he became a convert to the principles of Episcopacy, and united himself to the venerable remains of the once Established Church of Scotland. In 1740, when nineteen years of age, he went to Shetland, to act as preceptor in the family of Mr. Sinclair of Houss and Scalloway, where he remained about two years. Already he had commenced acquaintance with the muses, and on the death of his employer, in 1741, he embalmed his memory in an elegy, at the same time composing for him a Latin epitaph of such elegance and purity as to command the admiration of the learned Ruddiman. The only Episcopal clergyman in this remote region was a Mr. Hunter, whose daughter Mr. Skinner married. In 1742, on his return to Aberdeen, he entered into holy orders, and became the pastor of Longside.

For the ensuing sixty-five years Mr. Skinner spent a laborious life in the pastoral charge of a numerous congregation, answering, almost literally, to Goldsmith's description of the village preacher

> A man he was to all the country dear,
> And passing rich with forty pounds a year;
> Remote from towns he ran his godly race,
> Nor e'er had chang'd—nor wish'd to change his place.

Although he was not personally a friend of the house of Stuart, he could not help being involved in the persecution which the unhappy insurrection of 1745-6 brought upon the Scottish Episcopal communion. A military party came to his house when his wife was on child-bed, turned his family to the door, took away everything that was valuable, or which could be conveniently carried, and demolished the little chapel in which he officiated. On one occasion he was seized, and imprisoned in the jail of Aberdeen for six months, for preaching to more than four persons, that being then an offence on the part of any Episcopal clergyman. For many years, in consequence of the severity of the statutes against Episcopacy in Scotland, he was obliged either to officiate to his congregation in *fours*, or to take four within doors, and allow the rest to overhear him, as they best might, through the open doors and windows. Long before the close of his own professional career his eldest son had become the bishop of his diocese, and a son of that gentleman had also taken holy orders. On one occasion the three grandfather, father, and son,—officiated together in the chapel at Longside. Mr. Skinner lost his wife in 1799, and when his son some years after met a similar misfortune it was proposed that the old man should withdraw from the scene of his duties, and spend the remainder of his days with his son at Aberdeen. Accordingly, in June, 1807, he bade a tearful adieu to a flock over which he had presided for the greater part of a century, and which did not contain one individual whom he had not baptized. On the 16th of the same month he gently expired in his chair, after dining happily with three generations of his descendants. He was buried at Longside, where a handsome monument has been erected to him. His miscellaneous works, including a variety of poems and songs, in Scotch, English, and Latin, were soon after published. He was also the author of an *Ecclesiastical History of Scotland*, and of various theological works, one of which attracted the praise of Bishop Sherlock.

[1] Alexander Ross, schoolmaster, Lochlee, Forfarshire, author of the narrative poem "Helenore, or the Fortunate Shepherdess," and the songs, the "Rock and the wee pickle Tow," "Woo'd and Married an' a'," &c.

wise "owre cannie"—a "wild warlock"—but now he sings among the "sons of the morning."

I have often wished, and will certainly endeavour, to form a kind of common acquaintance among all the genuine sons of Caledonian song. The world, busy in low prosaic pursuits, may overlook most of us; but "reverence thyself." The world is not our *peers*, so we challenge the jury. We can lash that world, and find ourselves a very great source of amusement and happiness independent of that world.

There is a work going on in Edinburgh, just now, which claims your best assistance. An engraver in this town has set about collecting and publishing all the Scotch songs, with the music, that can be found. Songs in the English language, if by Scotchmen, are admitted, but the music must all be Scotch. Drs. Beattie and Blacklock are lending a hand, and the first musician in town presides over that department. I have been absolutely crazed about it, collecting old stanzas, and every information remaining respecting their origin, authors, &c. &c. This last is but a very fragment business; but at the end of his second number—the first is already published—a small account will be given of the authors, particularly to preserve those of latter times. Your three songs "Tullochgorum," "John of Badenyon," and "Ewie wi' the Crookit Horn," go in this second number. I was determined, before I got your letter, to write you, begging that you would let me know where the editions of these pieces may be found, as you would wish them to continue in future times: and if you would be so kind to this undertaking as send any songs, of your own or others, that you would think proper to publish, your name will be inserted among the other authors,—"Nill ye, will ye." One half of Scotland already give your songs to other authors. Paper is done. I beg to hear from you; the sooner the better, as I leave Edinburgh in a fortnight or three weeks.—I am, with the warmest sincerity, Sir, your obliged humble servant,

R. B.[1]

[1] Mr. Skinner's answer to the above was as follows:—

LINSHART, November 14th, 1787.

SIR,

Your kind letter, without date, but of post-mark October 25th, came to hand only this day; and, to testify my punctuality to my poetic engagement, I sit down immediately to answer it in kind.

Your acknowledgment of my poor but just encomiums on your surprising genius, and your opinion of my rhyming excursions, are both, I think, by far too high. The difference between our two tracts of education and ways of life is entirely in your favour, and gives you the preference every manner of way. I know a classical education will not create a versifying taste, but it mightily improves and assists it; —and though, where both these meet, there may sometimes be ground for approbation, yet where taste appears single, as it were, and neither cramped nor supported by acquisition, I will always sustain the justice of its prior claim to applause. A small portion of taste, this way, I have had almost from childhood, especially in the old Scottish dialect, and it is as old a thing as I remember, my fondness for "Christ's-kirk on the green," which I had by heart ere I was twelve years of age, and which some years ago I attempted to turn into Latin verse. While I was young, I dabbled a good deal in these things: but on getting the black gown I gave it pretty much over, 'till my daughters grew up, who, being all good singers, plagued me for words to some of their favourite tunes, and so extorted these effusions, which have made a public appearance beyond my expectations, and contrary to my intentions, at the same time that I hope there is nothing to be found in them uncharacteristic, or unbecoming the cloth, which I would always wish to see respected.

As to the assistance you propose from me in the undertaking you are engaged in, I am sorry I cannot give it so far as I could wish, and you, perhaps, expect. My daughters, who are my only intelligencers, are all *foris-familiate*, and the old woman, their mother, has lost that taste. There are two from my own pen, which I might give you, if worth the while. One to the old Scottish tune of "Dumbarton's Drums." The other, perhaps, you have met with, as your noble friend, the duchess, has, I am told, heard of it. It was squeezed out of me by a brother parson in her neighbourhood, to accommodate a new Highland reel for the Marquis's birthday, to the stanza of

Tune your fiddles, tune them sweetly, &c.

If this last answer your purpose, you may have it from a brother of mine, Mr. James Skinner, writer, in Edinburgh, who I believe can give the music too.

There is another humorous thing, I have heard said to be done by the Catholic priest, Geddes, and which hit my taste much.

There was a wee wifiekie, was coming frae the fair,
Had gotten a little drapikie, which bred her meikle care;
It took upo' the wifie's heart, and she began to spue,
And quo' the wee wifiekie, "I wish I binna fou," &c.

I have heard of another new composition, by a young ploughman of my acquaintance, that I am vastly pleased with, to the tune of "The Humours of Glen," which I fear won't do, as the music, I am told, is of Irish original. I have mentioned these, such as they are, to show you my readiness to oblige you, and to contribute my mite, if I could, to the patriotic

TO MISS MARGARET CHALMERS.[1]

EDINBURGH, Oct. 26th, 1787.

I send Charlotte[2] the first number of the songs; I would not wait for the second number: I hate delays in little marks of friendship, as I hate dissimulation in the language of the heart. I am determined to pay Charlotte a poetic compliment, if I could hit on some glorious old Scotch air, in number second.[3] You will see a small attempt on a shred of paper in the book; but though Dr. Blacklock commended it very highly, I am not just satisfied with it myself. I intend to make it description of some kind: the whining cant of love, except in real passion, and by a masterly hand, is to me as insufferable as the preaching cant of old Father Smeaton, whig-minister at Kilmaurs. Darts, flames, cupids, loves, graces, and all that farrago, are just a Mauchline sacrament—a senseless rabble.

I got an excellent poetic epistle yesternight from the old, venerable author of "Tatlochgorum," "John of Badenyon," &c. I suppose you know he is a clergyman. It is by far the finest poetic compliment I ever got. I will send you a copy of it.

I go on Thursday or Friday to Dumfries, to wait on Mr. Miller about his farms.—Do tell that to Lady Mackenzie, that she may give me credit for a little wisdom. "I Wisdom dwell with Prudence." What a blessed fireside! How happy should I be to pass a winter evening under their venerable roof! and smoke a pipe of tobacco, or drink water-gruel with them! What solemn, lengthened, laughter-quashing gravity of phiz! What sage remarks on the good-for-nothing sons and daughters of indiscretion and folly! And what frugal lessons, as we straitened the fireside circle, on the uses of the poker and tongs!

Miss Nimmo is very well, and begs to be remembered in the old way to you. I used all my eloquence, all the persuasive flourishes of the hand, and heart-melting modulation of periods in my power to urge her out to Harvieston, but all in vain. My rhetoric seems quite to have lost its effect on the lovely half of mankind. I have seen the day—but this is a "tale of other years."—In my conscience I believe that my heart has been so oft on fire that it is absolutely vitrified. I look on the sex with something like the admiration with which I regard the starry sky in a frosty December night. I admire the beauty of the Creator's workmanship; I am charmed with the wild but graceful eccentricity of their motions, and—wish them good night. I mean this with respect to a certain passion *dont j'ai eu l'honneur d'être un miserable esclave:* as for friendship, you and Charlotte have given me pleasure, permanent pleasure, "which the world cannot give, nor take away" I hope; and which will outlast the heavens and the earth.

R. B.

TO MR. JAMES CANDLISH, GLASGOW.

EDINBURGH, Nov. 1787.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

If once I were gone from this scene of hurry and dissipation, I promise myself the pleasure of that correspondence being renewed which has been so long broken. At present I have

work you have in hand, and which I wish all success to. You have only to notify your mind, and what you want of the above shall be sent you.

Meantime, while you are thus employed, do not sheathe your own proper and piercing weapon. From what I have seen of yours already, I am inclined to hope for much good. One lesson of virtue and morality delivered in your amusing style, and from such as you, will operate more than dozens would do from such as me, who shall be told it is our employment, and be never more minded: whereas, from a pen like yours, as being one of the many, what comes will be admired. Admiration will produce regard, and regard will leave an impression, especially *when example goes along.*

Now binna saying I'm ill-bred, be not
Else, by my troth, I'll no be glad;
For cadgers, ye have heard it said,
And sic like fry, such
Maun aye be harlin' in their trade, must always be dragging
And sae maun I.

Wishing you, from my poet-pen, all success, and in my other character all happiness and heavenly direction, I remain, with esteem, your sincere friend,

JOHN SKINNER.

[1] Afterwards Mrs. Lewis Hay, but about this period one of the inmates of the home of Mr. John Tait of Harvieston, twice visited by Burns in the autumn of 1787. Previous to this date, however, the poet had made her acquaintance in Edinburgh. The present is the first of Burns's letters to this young lady so far as is known, but probably one or more preceded it.

[2] Miss Charlotte Hamilton, cousin of Miss Chalmers, also a resident at Harvieston. See letter to Gavin Hamilton, 28th August, 1787, with notes.

[3] Of the *Scots Musical Museum.*

time for nothing. Dissipation and business engross every moment. I am engaged in assisting an honest Scotch enthusiast,[1] a friend of mine, who is an engraver, and has taken it into his head to publish a collection of all our songs set to music, of which the words and music are done by Scotsmen. This, you will easily guess, is an undertaking exactly to my taste. I have collected, begged, borrowed, and stolen, all the songs I could meet with. "Pompey's Ghost," words and music,[2] I beg from you immediately, to go into his second number: the first is already published. I shall show you the first number when I see you in Glasgow, which will be in a fortnight or less. Do be so kind as to send me the song in a day or two: you cannot imagine how much it will oblige me.

Direct to me at Mr. W. Cruikshank's, St. James's Square, New Town, Edinburgh.

R. B.

TO MRS. DUNLOP OF DUNLOP,

DUNLOP HOUSE, STEWARTON.

EDINBURGH, 4th Nov. 1787.

MADAM,

I will bear the reproaches of my conscience respecting this letter no longer. I was indebted to you some time ago for a kind, long letter (your letters the longer the better), and again the other day I heard from you, enclosing a very friendly letter from Dr. Moore. I thought with myself, in the height of my gratitude and pride, of my remark that I would sit down some hour of inspiration, and write you a letter, at least worth two groats; consequently you would have been a great gainer, as you are so benevolent as to bestow your epistolary correspondence on me (I am sure) without the least idea of being paid *in kind*.

When you talk of friendship and correspondence to me, Madam, you do me too much honour; but as I shall soon be at my wonted leisure and rural occupation, if any remark on what I have read or seen, or any new rhyme I may twist, that is worth while—if such a letter, Madam, can give a person of your rank, information, and abilities any entertainment, you shall have it with all my heart and soul.

It requires no common exertion of good sense and philosophy in persons of exalted rank, to keep a friendship properly alive with one much their inferior. Externals, things totally extraneous of the man, steal upon the hearts and judgments of almost, if not altogether, all mankind; nor do I know more than one instance of a man who fully and truly regards "all the world as a stage, and all the men and women merely players," and who (the dancing-school bow excepted) only values these players—the *dramatis personæ*, who build cities, and who rear hedges; who govern provinces, or superintend flocks, merely as they *act their parts*. For the honour of Ayrshire, this man is Professor Dugald Stewart of Catrine. To him I might perhaps add another instance, a Popish Bishop, Geddes;[3] but I have outraged that gloomy, fiery Presbyterianism enough already, though I don't spit in her lugubrious face by telling her that the first Cleric character I ever saw was a Roman Catholic.

I could ill endure those surly curbs of "Chaos and old night"—those ghostly beasts of prey who foul the hallowed ground of Religion with their nocturnal prowlings; but if the prosecution which I hear the Erebean fanatics are projecting against my learned and truly worthy friend, Dr. M'Gill,[4] goes on, I shall keep no measure with the savages, but fly at them with the *faucons* of Ridicule, or run them down with the bloodhounds of Satire, as lawful game wherever I start them.

I expect to leave Edinburgh in eight or ten days, and shall certainly do myself the honour of calling at Dunlop House as I return to Ayrshire.—I have the honour to be, Madam, your obliged humble servant,

R. B.

[1] Johnson, the publisher of the *Musical Museum*.

[2] "Pompey's Ghost" was a ditty which is said by Mr. Scott Douglas to have appeared in a standard collection, entitled *The Blackbird*, published in 1764.

[3] The Right Rev. Dr. John Geddes. See note to letter addressed to this reverend gentleman (who has sometimes been mistaken for his better known relative, Dr. Alexander Geddes), of date 3d Feb. 1789.

[4] In regard to this reverend gentleman (whose name also occurs in the "Twa Herds") see note to the poem the "Kirk's Alarm," vol. iii.

TO JAMES HOY, ESQ.,
GORDON CASTLE.[1]

EDIN. 6th November, 1787.

DEAR SIR,

I would have wrote you immediately on receipt of your kind letter, but a mixed impulse of gratitude and esteem whispered to me that I ought to send you something by way of return. When a poet owes anything, particularly when he is indebted for good offices, the payment that usually recurs to him—the only coin indeed in which he is probably conversant—is rhyme. Johnson sends the books by the fly, as directed, and begs me to inclose his most grateful thanks: my return I intended should have been one or two poetic bagatelles which the world have not seen, or, perhaps, for obvious reasons, cannot see. These I shall send you before I leave Edinburgh. They may make you laugh a little, which, on the whole, is no bad way of spending one's precious hours and still more precious breath: at any rate, they will be, though a small, yet a very sincere mark of my respectful esteem for a gentleman whose farther acquaintance I should look upon as a peculiar obligation.

The duke's song,[2] independent totally of his

[1] The following sketch of Mr. Hoy's life and character is from the pen of Dr. Carruthers of Inverness:—

"The late Mr. James Hoy, librarian to the Duke of Gordon, was, in many respects, a singular and original character. In goodness of heart, and simplicity of manners, he was not unlike Dominie Sampson himself; and, during the long period of forty-six years, during which he was the inmate of a ducal mansion, he lost not a shade of his originality, or abated one jot of his stoical indifference to riches. The love of learning and of virtue which distinguished Mr. Hoy, added to his simple and primitive habits, rendered him universally respected and noted in the neighbourhood of Gordon Castle; and in the noble family in which he resided he maintained all the same familiar footing that his celebrated prototype, whom we have named above, preserved at Ellangowan. Mr. Hoy was born at Haining, in Selkirkshire, in the year 1747. His father was gardener to Pringle of Haining, or Clifton, afterwards [illegible] Ailmore, one of the lords of Session, and his lordship's daughter, Miss Violet Pringle, observing young Hoy to be a steady sedate lad, had him educated, according to his parents' wishes, for the dissenting church. Lord Ailmore becoming blind, young Hoy was engaged to be his reader and companion. Even at this early period he must have discovered considerable signs of scientific genius, for he had an offer to go to Ireland with Banks and Solander as botanist, and to assist in other departments of science.

"It was as a sort of literary companion, and as one able to scale the different heights and bearings round Gordon Castle, that Mr. Hoy was recommended to the duke, and scarcely any other situation could have been so admirably calculated to promote his own happiness; for, as his whole enjoyment was in books, so that which was his delight now became his duty. To him the charge of the duke's library was committed. It became the castle of which he was appointed governor, and he was never out of his garrison except at meal-times, or when called into the fields by his scientific pursuits, or on Sundays, when he never failed, let the weather be what it might, to mount his horse, to ride to Elgin to attend the Seceder meeting-house. As the duke's engagements and occupations deprived him of sufficient leisure to peruse the numerous books of miscellaneous information which were continually appearing, it became Mr. Hoy's business to devote his forenoons to reading them as they arrived; and then he was enabled, as they sat *tête à tête* over their bottle of claret together after dinner, to fill the duke with all that was worth remembering, and his grace's memory was such that it never afterwards lost what it thus received.

"Mr. Hoy's chief sciences were astronomy, entomology, and botany. To the first of these he adhered steadily to his dying day, and made almost daily observations on the heavenly bodies, and from his having undertaken the regulation of the clocks at Gordon Castle and Fochabers, it was matter of notoriety that his was the only accurately kept time in the north of Scotland.

"We need scarcely say that Mr. Hoy was quite indifferent to fame; he equally despised riches, never seeking for more than might enable him to dispense some charities, and to afford himself respectable clothes, of which he never had more than two suits at a time. When his kind and indulgent patron voluntarily offered him an addition to his sixty-pound salary, he replied, 'Keep it to yoursel', my lord duke, I'm no needin' mair; ye hae as muckle need o't as I hae.' When Burns was at Gordon Castle he was particularly delighted with Hoy's blunt manner, and perhaps the circumstance of his being a native of the Borders gave him an additional value in the poet's estimation. Mr. Hoy left orders in his will that his remains should be interred in the churchyard of the cathedral 'near his auld frien' Mr. Duncan,' the Seceder minister, to whom he had listened so many years of his life, in defiance of the wind, rain, snow, or sunshine that may have vainly assailed him during his hebdomadal rides to Elgin.

"The old librarian followed his noble master to the grave, after the interval of a few short months, and we cannot take our leave of him better than in the well-known words of the immortal dramatist:—

> O good old man! how well in thee appears
> The constant service of the antique world,
> When service sweat for duty, not for meed!"

[2] Alexander, fourth duke of Gordon, wrote a set of words to the old tune of "Cauld kail in Aberdeen." Burns obtained a copy from Mr. Hoy, and inserted it in the first volume of the *Museum*.

dukeship, charms me. There is I know not what of wild happiness of thought and expression peculiarly beautiful in the old Scottish song style, of which his Grace, old venerable Skinner, the author of "Tullochgorum," &c., and the late Ross, at Lochlee, of true Scottish poetic memory, are the only modern instances that I recollect, since Ramsay with his contemporaries, and poor Bob Fergusson went to the world of deathless existence and truly immortal song. The mob of mankind, that many-headed beast, would laugh at so serious a speech about an old song; but, as Job says, "O that mine adversary had written a book!" Those who think that composing a Scotch song is a trifling business—let them try it.

I wish my Lord Duke would pay a proper attention to the Christian admonition—"Hide not your candle under a bushel," but "Let your light shine before men." I could name half a dozen dukes that I guess are a devilish deal worse employed; nay, I question if there are half a dozen better: perhaps there are not half that scanty number whom Heaven has favoured with the tuneful, happy, and, I will say, glorious gift.

I am, dear Sir, your obliged humble servant,

R. B.

TO MISS CHALMERS.

EDINBURGH, 6th November, 1787.

MY DEAR MADAM,

I just now have read yours. The poetic compliments I pay cannot be misunderstood. They are neither of them so particular as to point you out to the world at large; and the circle of your acquaintances will allow all I have said. Besides, I have complimented you chiefly, almost solely, on your mental charms. Shall I be plain with you? I will; so look to it. Personal attractions, madam, you have much above par—wit, understanding, and worth you possess in the first class. This is a cursed flat way of telling you these truths, but let me hear no more of your sheepish timidity. I know the world a little. I know what they will say of my poems (by second sight I suppose, for I am seldom out in my conjectures); and you may believe me, my dear madam, I would not run any risk of hurting you by any ill-judged compliment. I wish to show to the world the odds between a poet's friends and those of simple prosemen. More for your information, both the pieces go in. One of them, "Where braving angry winter's storms," is already set,—the tune is Neil Gow's Lamentation for *Abercairney;* the other[1] is to be set to an old Highland air in Daniel Dow's collection of ancient Scots music; the name is "*Ha a Chaillich air mo Dheith.*" My treacherous memory has forgot every circumstance about *Les Incas*, only I think you mentioned them as being in Creech's possession. I shall ask him about it. I am afraid the song of "Somebody" will come too late—as I shall, for certain, leave town in a week for Ayrshire, and from that to Dumfries, but there my hopes are slender. I leave my direction in town, so any thing, wherever I am, will reach me.

I saw yours to———; it is not too severe, nor did he take it amiss. On the contrary, like a whipt spaniel, he talks of being with you in the Christmas days. Mr. Tait has given him the invitation, and he is determined to accept of it. O selfishness! he owns, in his sober moments, that from his own volatility of inclination, the circumstances in which he is situated, and his knowledge of his father's disposition, the whole affair is chimerical,—yet he *will* gratify an idle *penchant* at the enormous, cruel expense, of perhaps ruining the peace of the very woman for whom he professes the generous passion of love! He is a gentleman in his mind and manners—*tant pis!* He is a volatile school-boy—the heir of a man's fortune who well knows the value of two times two!

Perdition seize them and their fortunes, before they should make the amiable, the lovely———, the derided object of their purse-proud contempt!

I am doubly happy to hear of Mrs. ———'s recovery, because I really thought all was over with her. There are days of pleasure yet awaiting her:

> As I came in by Glenap,
> I met with an aged woman;
> She bade me cheer up my heart,
> For the best o' my days was comin'.[2]

[1] "My Peggy's face, my Peggy's form." See vol. ii. pp. 232, 233.

[2] This old rhyme, Lockhart tells us, was a great favourite with the poet. He is said to have often

This day will decide my affairs with Creech. Things are, like myself, not what they ought to be; yet better than what they appear to be.

Heaven's Sovereign saves all beings but himself—
That hideous sight—a naked human heart.

Farewell! remember me to Charlotte.

R. B.

TO MISS MARGARET CHALMERS.

EDINBURGH, [18th Nov.] 1787.

I have been at Dumfries, and at one visit more shall be decided about a farm in that country. I am rather hopeless in it: but as my brother is an excellent farmer, and is, besides, an exceedingly prudent sober man (qualities which are only a younger brother's fortune in our family), I am determined, if my Dumfries business fail me, to return into partnership with him, and at our leisure take another farm in the neighbourhood.

I assure you I look for high compliments from you and Charlotte on this very sage instance of my unfathomable, incomprehensible wisdom. Talking of Charlotte, I must tell her that I have, to the best of my power, paid her a poetic compliment now completed.[1] The air is admirable: true old Highland. It was the tune of a Gaelic song which an Inverness lady sung me when I was there; I was so charmed with it that I begged her to write me a set of it from her singing; for it had never been so before. I am fixed that it shall go to Johnson's next number; so Charlotte and you need not spend your precious time in contradicting me. I won't say the poetry is first rate; though I am convinced it is very well; and, what is not always the case with compliments to ladies, it is not only *sincere*, but *just*.

R. B.

TO MISS CHALMERS.

EDINBURGH, Nov. 21, 1787.

I have one vexatious fault to the kindly welcome, well-filled sheet which I owe to your and Charlotte's goodness—it contains too much sense, sentiment, and good spelling. It is impossible that even you two, whom I declare to my God I will give credit for any degree of excellence the sex are capable of attaining, it is impossible you can go on to correspond at that rate; so, like those who, Shenstone says, retire because they have made a good speech, I shall, after a few letters, hear no more of you. I insist that you shall write whatever comes first: what you see, what you read, what you hear, what you admire, what you dislike, trifles, bagatelles, nonsense; or to fill up a corner, e'en put down a laugh at full length. Now none of your polite hints about flattery; I leave that to your lovers, if you have or shall have any; though, thank heaven, I have found at last two girls who can be luxuriantly happy in their own minds and with one another, without that commonly necessary appendage to female bliss—A LOVER.

Charlotte and you are just two favourite resting-places for my soul in her wanderings through the weary, thorny wilderness of this world. God knows, I am ill-fitted for the struggle: I glory in being a Poet, and I want to be thought a wise man—I would fondly be generous, and I wish to be rich. After all, I am afraid I am a lost subject. "Some folk hae a hantle [good many] o' fauts, and I'm but a ne'er-do-weel."

Afternoon.—To close the melancholy reflections at the end of last sheet, I shall just add a piece of devotion, commonly known in 'arrick by the title of the "Wabster's grace:"—

Some say we're thieves, and e'en sae are we,
Some say we lie, and e'en sae do we!
Gude forgie us, and I hope sae will He!
——Up and to your looms, lads.

R. B.

repeated it to himself on his first journey to Edinburgh. Glenap is in the south of Ayrshire.

[1] This was the song "How pleasant the banks of the clear winding Devon." See vol. ii. page 231.

TO ROBERT AINSLIE, ESQ.,

EDINBURGH.

EDINBURGH, Sunday morning,
Nov. 25, 1787.

I beg, my dear Sir, you would not make any appointment to take us to Mr. Ainslie's[2] to-night. On looking over my engagements, constitution, present state of my health, some

[2] This Mr. Ainslie was a bookseller in Edinburgh and a relative of the poet's correspondent.

little vexatious soul concerns, &c., I find I can't sup abroad to-night. I shall be in to-day till one o'clock if you have a leisure hour.

You will think it romantic when I tell you, that I find the idea of your friendship almost necessary to my existence. You assume a proper length of face in my bitter hours of blue-devilism, and you laugh fully up to my highest wishes at my good things—I don't know upon the whole, if you are one of the first fellows in God's world, but you are so to me. I tell you this just now in the conviction that some inequalities in my temper and manner may perhaps sometimes make you suspect that I am not so warmly as I ought to be your friend,

R. B.

TO MR. BEUGO,[1] ENGRAVER,

PRINCES STREET.

ST. JAMES'S SQUARE, Tuesday Even [27th Nov. 1787].

MY DEAR SIR,

A certain sourfaced acquaintance called "Glauber's Salts" hinders me from my lesson to-night. To-morrow night I will not fail.

ROBT. BURNS.

TO MISS MABANE.[2]

Saturday Noon [1st December, 1787].
No. 2 ST. JAMES'S SQUARE,
NEW TOWN, EDINBURGH.

Here have I sat, my dear Madam, in the stony attitude of perplexed study for fifteen vexatious minutes, my head askew, bending over the intended card; my fixed eye insensible to the very light of day poured around; my pendulous goose-feather, loaded with ink, hanging over the future letter, all for the important purpose of writing a complimentary card to accompany your trinket.

Compliment is such a miserable Greenland expression, lies at such a chilly polar distance from the torrid zone of my constitution, that I cannot for the very soul of me, use it to any person for whom I have the twentieth part of the esteem every one must have for you who knows you.

As I leave town in three or four days, I can give myself the pleasure of calling on you only for a minute. Tuesday evening, some time about seven or after, I shall wait on you for your farewell commands.

The hinge of your box I put into the hands of the proper connoisseur. The broken glass, likewise, went under review; but deliberative wisdom thought it would too much endanger the whole fabric [to replace it].

I am, dear Madam, with all sincerity of enthusiasm, your very obedient servant,

R. B.

TO MISS CHALMERS, HARVIESTON.

EDINBURGH, Dec. 12, 1787.

Here I am under the care of a surgeon, with a bruised limb extended on a cushion, and the tints of my mind vying with the livid horrors preceding a midnight thunder-storm. A drunken coachman was the cause of the first, and incomparably the lightest evil; misfortune, bodily constitution, hell, and myself have formed a "quadruple alliance" to guarantee the other. I got my fall on Saturday, and am getting slowly better.

I have taken tooth and nail to the Bible, and am got through the five books of Moses, and half way in Joshua. It is really a glorious book. I sent for my book-binder to-day, and ordered him to get me an octavo Bible in sheets, the best paper and print in town, and bind it with all the elegance of his craft.

I would give my best song to my worst enemy—I mean the merit of making it—to have you and Charlotte by me. You are angelic creatures, and would pour oil and wine into my wounded spirit.

I inclose you a proof copy of the "Banks of the Devon,"[3] which present with my best wishes to Charlotte. The "Ochil-hills"[4] you

[1] The clever young artist who gratuitously engraved Nasmyth's portrait of the poet. Mr. Scott Douglas, who first published the letter, supposes that the poet and engraver were taking evening lessons in Latin or French together.

[2] Afterwards Mrs. Colonel Wright. Where or how the poet formed the acquaintance of this lady it is now impossible to say. The letter first appeared in Stewart's *Collection of the Clarinda Letters* (Glasgow 1802).

[3] See vol. ii. p. 231.

[4] The song beginning, "Where, braving angry winter's storms."—Vol. ii. p. 232.

shall probably have next week for yourself. None of your fine speeches!

R. B.

TO MR. FRANCIS HOWDEN,[1]

JEWELLER, PARLIAMENT SQUARE

ST. JAMES'S SQUARE, No. 2, Attic Storey
[Dec. 1787].

The bearer of this will deliver you a small shade[2] to set; which, my dear Sir, if you would highly oblige a poor cripple devil as I am at present, you will finish at farthest against to-morrow evening. It goes a hundred miles into the country; and if it is at me by five o'clock to-morrow evening, I have an opportunity of a private hand to convey it; if not, I don't know how to get it sent. Set it just as you did the others you did for me, "in the neatest and cheapest manner;" both to answer as a breast pin, and with a ring to answer as a locket. Do despatch it; as it is, I believe, the pledge of love, and perhaps the prelude to ma-tri-mo-ny. Everybody knows the auld wife's observation when she saw a poor dog going to be hanged—"God help us! it's the gate [way] we hae a' to gang!"

The parties, one of them at least, is a very particular acquaintance of mine—the honest lover. He only needs a little of an advice which my grandmother, rest her soul, often gave me, and I as often neglected:—

Leuk twice or [ere] you loup [leap] ance.

Let me conjure, you my friend, by the bended bow of Cupid—by the unloosed cestus of Venus—by the lighted torch of Hymen—that you will have the locket finished by the time mentioned! And if your worship would have as much Christian charity as call with it yourself, and comfort a poor wretch, not wounded indeed by Cupid's arrow, but bruised by a good, serious, agonizing, damned, hard knock on the knee, you will gain the earnest prayers, when he does pray, of, dear Sir, your humble servant,

R. B.

[1] This gentleman, an enthusiastic political reformer, died at an advanced age in 1848.

[2] A silhouette portrait.

TO CHARLES HAY, ESQ.[3]

ENCLOSING VERSES ON THE DEATH OF THE LORD PRESIDENT.

December, 1787.

The inclosed poem was written in consequence of your suggestion, last time I had the pleasure of seeing you. It cost me an hour or two of next morning's sleep, but did not please me; so it lay by, an ill-digested effort, till the other day that I gave it a critic brush.

These kind of subjects are much hackneyed; and, besides, the wailings of the rhyming tribe over the ashes of the great are cursedly suspicious, and out of all character for sincerity.—These ideas damped my muse's fire; however, I have done the best I could, and, at all events, it gives me an opportunity of declaring that I have the honour to be, Sir, your obliged and humble servant,

R. B.

TO MISS CHALMERS,

HARVIESTON.

EDINBURGH, 19th Dec. 1787.

I begin this letter in answer to yours of the 17th current, which is not yet cold since I read it. The atmosphere of my soul is vastly clearer than when I wrote you last. For the first time, yesterday I crossed the room on crutches. It would do your heart good to see my bardship, not on my poetic, but on my oaken stilts; throwing my best leg with an air! and with as much hilarity in my gait and countenance, as a May frog leaping across the newly harrowed ridge, enjoying the fragrance of the refreshed earth, after the long expected shower!

I can't say I am altogether at my ease when I see anywhere in my path that meagre,

[3] This gentleman was an advocate at the Scottish bar at the time Burns resided in Edinburgh, and a member of the club called "The Crochallan Fencibles," to which the poet also belonged, and of which we have spoken in a former note. He was ultimately raised to the bench with the title of Lord Newton. He died at Powrie in Forfarshire on the 10th October, 1811, leaving behind him the character of an able lawyer, an upright judge, and at the same time a very convivial companion. The verses will be found in vol. ii. p. 234.

squalid, famine-faced spectre, Poverty, attended, as he always is, by iron-fisted Oppression and leering Contempt; but I have sturdily withstood his buffetings many a hard-laboured day already, and still my motto is—I DARE! My worst enemy is *moi même*. I lie so miserably open to the inroads and incursions of a mischievous, light-armed, well-mounted banditti, under the banners of Imagination, Whim, Caprice, and Passion; and the heavy-armed veteran regulars of Wisdom, Prudence, and Forethought move so very, very slow, that I am almost in a state of perpetual warfare, and, alas! frequent defeat. There are just two creatures I would envy—a horse in his wild state traversing the forests of Asia, or an oyster on some of the desert shores of Europe. The one has not a wish without enjoyment; the other has neither wish nor fear.[1]

R. B.

TO MR. RICHARD BROWN,[2]

IRVINE.

EDINBURGH, 30th Dec. 1787.

MY DEAR SIR,

I have met with few things in life which have given me more pleasure than Fortune's kindness to you since those days in which we met in the vale of misery; as I can honestly say, that I never knew a man who more truly deserved it, or to whom my heart more truly wished it. I have been much indebted since that time to your story and sentiments for steeling my mind against evils, of which I have had a pretty decent share. My will-o'-wisp fate you know: do you recollect a Sunday we spent together in Eglinton woods? You told me, on my repeating some verses to you, that you wondered I could resist the temptation of sending verses of such merit to a magazine. It was from this remark I derived the idea of my own pieces, which encouraged me to endeavour at the character of a poet. I am happy to hear that you will be two or three months at home. As soon as a bruised limb will permit me, I shall return to Ayrshire, and we shall meet; "and faith, I hope we'll not sit dumb, nor yet cast out!"

I have much to tell you "of men, their manners, and their ways," perhaps a little of the other sex. Apropos, I beg to be remembered to Mrs. Brown. There I doubt not, my dear friend, but you have found substantial happiness. I expect to find you something of an altered but not a different man; the wild, bold, generous young fellow composed into the steady, affectionate husband, and the fond careful parent. For me, I am just the same will-o'-wisp being I used to be. About the first and fourth quarters of the moon, I generally set in for the trade wind of wisdom; but about the full and change, I am the luckless victim of mad tornadoes, which blow me into Chaos. Almighty love still reigns and revels in my bosom; and I am at this moment ready to hang myself for a young Edinburgh widow,[3] who has wit and wisdom more murderously

[1] "'Come, stubborn pride and unshrinking resolution, accompany me through this, to me, miserable world!' In such language did this powerful but untamed mind express the irritation of prolonged expectation and disappointed hope, which slight reflection might have pointed out as the common fate of mortality. Burns neither acknowledged adversity as the 'tamer of the human breast,' nor knew the golden curb which discretion hangs upon passion. He even appears to have felt a gloomy pleasure in braving the encounter of evils which prudence might have avoided, and to have thought that there could be no pleasurable existence between the extremes of licentious frenzy and torpid sensuality. 'There are only two creatures that I would envy: a horse in his wild state traversing the forests of Asia, or an oyster on some of the desert shores of Europe. The one has not a wish without enjoyment; the other has neither wish nor fear.' When such a sentiment is breathed by such a being, the lesson is awful: and if pride and ambition were capable of being taught, they might hence learn that a well regulated mind and controlled passions are to be prized above all the glow of imagination, and all the splendour of genius."—SIR WALTER SCOTT.

[2] This was the Irvine companion of whom Burns speaks in his autobiography to Dr. Moore, as one possessed of a mind fraught with independence, magnanimity, and every manly virtue, and yet whose conversation, on the subject of the intercourse of the sexes, first corrupted his young feelings (though Brown is said to have demurred a little to this last statement). His later life was more prosperous, than his early career.——"The letters to Richard Brown, written at a period when the poet was in the full blaze of reputation, showed that he was at no time so dazzled with success as to forget the friends who had anticipated the public by discovering his merit."—WALKER.

[3] Mrs. M'Lehose (Clarinda), who was, however, familiarly speaking, a "grass" widow. See Introduction to the Correspondence with Clarinda, vol. iv.

fatal than the assassinating stiletto of the Sicilian banditti, or the poisoned arrow of the savage African. My highland dirk, that used to hang beside my crutches, I have gravely removed to a neighbouring closet, the key of which I cannot command in case of spring-tide paroxysms. You may guess of her wit by the following verses, which she sent me the other day.[1]

My best compliments to our friend Allan. Adieu!

R. B.

TO MRS. DUNLOP.[2]

EDINBURGH, Jan. 21st, 1788.

. . . After six weeks' confinement, I am beginning to walk across the room. They have been six horrible weeks; anguish and low spirits made me unfit to read, write, or think.

I have a hundred times wished that one could resign life as an officer resigns a commission: for I would not take in any poor ignorant wretch by selling out. Lately I was a sixpenny private; and, God knows, a miserable soldier enough: now I march to the campaign a starving cadet, a little more conspicuously wretched.

I am ashamed of all this; for though I do want bravery for the warfare of life, I could wish, like some other soldiers, to have as much fortitude or cunning as to dissemble or conceal my cowardice.

As soon as I can bear the journey, which will be, I suppose, about the middle of next week, I leave Edinburgh; and soon after I shall pay my grateful duty at Dunlop House.

R. B.

TO MISS CHALMERS.

[EDINBURGH, 22nd Jan. 1788.]

Now for that wayward, unfortunate thing, myself. I have broke measures with Creech, and last week I wrote him a frosty, keen letter. He replied in terms of chastisement, and promised me upon his honour that I should have the account on Monday; but this is Tuesday, and yet I have not heard a word from him. God have mercy on me! a poor damned, incautious, duped, unfortunate fool! The sport, the miserable victim of rebellious pride, hypochondriac imagination, agonizing sensibility, and bedlam passions!

"I wish that I were dead, but I'm no like to die!" I had lately "a hair-breadth 'scape in th' imminent deadly breach" of love too. Thank my stars I got off heart-whole, "waur fleyed [worse frightened] than hurt."—Interruption.

I have this moment got a hint[3] . . . I fear I am something like—undone; but I hope for the best. Come, stubborn pride and unshrinking resolution, accompany me through this, to me, miserable world! You must not desert me. Your friendship I think I can count on, though I should date my letters from a marching regiment. Early in life, and all my life, I reckoned on a recruiting drum as my forlorn hope. Seriously, though, life at present presents me with but a melancholy path; but—my limb will soon be sound, and I shall struggle on.

R. B.

TO THE EARL OF GLENCAIRN.

EDINBURGH, [January], 1788.

MY LORD,

I know your Lordship will disapprove of my ideas in a request I am going to make to you; but I have weighed, long and seriously weighed, my situation, my hopes, and turn of mind, and am fully fixed to my scheme, if I can possibly effectuate it. I wish to get into the Excise: I am told that your Lordship's interest will easily procure me the grant from the commissioners; and your Lordship's patronage and

[1] The verses were in all likelihood those commencing, "When first you saw Clarinda's charms." See notes to early letters in the Clarinda Correspondence.

[2] "This is one of the best amongst a whole series of eloquent hypochondriasm."—JEFFREY.

[3] Cunningham suggests that this sudden and alarming "hint" was a rumour of Creech's insolvency; but Chambers says the publisher's business had always been so prosperous that at no time could there have been any suspicion of financial difficulties connected with it. The probability is that the poet had received the distressing news from home that Jean Armour, soon again to become a mother, was, as he says in a letter to Mrs. Dunlop in July, "when I was laid up a cripple in Edinburgh, literally turned out of doors, and wrote to a friend to shelter her till my return."

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goodness, which have already rescued me from obscurity, wretchedness, and exile, embolden me to ask that interest. You have likewise put it in my power to save the little tie of home that sheltered an aged mother, two brothers, and three sisters from destruction. There, my Lord, you have bound me over to the highest gratitude.

My brother's farm is but a wretched lease, but I think he will probably weather out the remaining seven years of it; and after the assistance which I have given, and will give him, to keep the family together, I think, by my guess, I shall have rather better than two hundred pounds, and instead of seeking, what is almost impossible at present to find, a farm that I can certainly live by, with so small a stock, I shall lodge this sum in a banking-house, a sacred deposit, excepting only the calls of uncommon distress or necessitous old age. . . .

These, my Lord, are my views: I have resolved from the maturest deliberation; and now I am fixed, I shall leave no stone unturned to carry my resolve into execution. Your Lordship's patronage is the strength of my hopes; nor have I yet applied to any body else. Indeed my heart sinks within me at the idea of applying to any other of the Great who have honoured me with their countenance. I am ill qualified to dog the heels of greatness with the impertinence of solicitation, and tremble nearly as much at the thought of the cold promise as the cold denial; but to your Lordship I have not only the honour, the comfort, but the pleasure of being your Lordship's much obliged and deeply indebted humble servant.[1]

R. B.

[1] In reference to this letter Lockhart remarks: "It would be hard to think that this letter was coldly or negligently received; on the contrary, we know that Burns's gratitude to Lord Glencairn lasted as long as his life. But the excise appointment which he coveted was not procured by any exertion of this noble patron's influence. Mr. Alexander Wood . . . communicated the state of the poet's case to Mr. Graham of Fintry, one of the commissioners of excise, who had met Burns at the Duke of Athole's in the autumn, and who immediately had the poet's name put on the roll." In regard to Lord Glencairn we have already given some particulars in a note on the poet's fine "Lament" for this nobleman in vol. iii. He was the fourteenth who bore the title, to which he acceded in 1775. In 1780 he became one of the Scottish representative peers, but he seems to have done nothing of a public nature worthy of remembrance, and his name would assuredly have now been quite forgotten but for his connection with Burns, whom he was the first of the great to take by the hand. When the earl's premature death took place in 1791, Burns was anxious to be present at the funeral (see his letter to Alex. Dalziel, his lordship's factor), and for some time he wore mourning for the deceased nobleman. He also named one of his sons after him. The earl was succeeded by his brother, who died in 1796, since which time the title has been dormant. Besides the "Lament" Burns also wrote in honour of the earl his patron, the "Verses intended to be written below a noble Earl's picture," beginning:

> Whose is that noble, dauntless brow?
> And whose that eye of fire?
> And whose that generous princely mien,
> E'en rooted foes admire?

See vol. ii. p. 206.

TO ROBERT GRAHAM, ESQ.,

OF FINTRY.

[EDINBURGH, January, 1788.]

SIR,

When I had the honour of being introduced to you at Athole-house, I did not think so soon of asking a favour of you. When Lear, in Shakspeare, asked Old Kent, why he wished to be in his service, he answers, "Because you have that in your face which I would fain call master." For some such reason, Sir, do I now solicit your patronage. You know, I dare say, of an application I lately made to your Board to be admitted an officer of Excise. I have, according to form, been examined by a supervisor, and to-day I gave in his certificate, with a request for an order for instructions. In this affair, if I succeed, I am afraid I shall but too much need a patronizing friend. Propriety of conduct as a man, and fidelity and attention as an officer, I dare engage for; but with any thing like business, except manual labour, I am totally unacquainted.

I had intended to have closed my late appearance on the stage of life, in the character of a country farmer; but, after discharging some filial and fraternal claims, I find I could only fight for existence in that miserable manner, which I have lived to see throw a venerable parent into the jaws of a jail; whence death, the poor man's last and often best friend, rescued him.

I know, Sir, that to need your goodness, is to have a claim on it; may I, therefore, beg your patronage to forward me in this affair,

till I be appointed to a division; where, by the help of rigid economy, I will try to support the independence so dear to my soul, but which has been too often so distant from my situation.

R. B.

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

EDINBURGH, Feb. 12th, 1788.

Some things in your late letters hurt me: not that *you say them*, but that *you mistake me*. Religion, my honoured Madam, has not only been all my life my chief dependence but my dearest enjoyment. I have, indeed, been the luckless victim of wayward follies; but, alas! I have ever been "more fool than knave." A mathematician without religion is a probable character; an irreligious poet is a monster. . . .

R. B.

TO THE REV. JOHN SKINNER.[1]

EDINBURGH, 14th Feb. 1788.

REVEREND AND DEAR SIR,

I have been a cripple now near three months, though I am getting vastly better, and have been very much hurried beside, or else I would have wrote you sooner. I must beg your pardon for the epistle you sent me appearing in the Magazine. I had given a copy or two to some of my intimate friends, but did not know of the printing of it till the publication of the Magazine. However, as it does great honour to us both, you will forgive it.

The second volume of the songs I mentioned to you in my last is published to-day. I send you a copy, which I beg you will accept as a mark of the veneration I have long had, and shall ever have, for your character, and of the claim I make to your continued acquaintance. Your songs appear in the third volume, with your name in the index; as I assure you, Sir, I have heard your "Tullochgorum," particularly among our west-country folks, given to many different names, and most commonly to the immortal author of "The Minstrel," who, indeed, never wrote any thing superior to "Gie's a sang, Montgomery cried." Your brother has promised me your verses to the Marquis of Huntley's reel, which certainly deserve a place in the collection. My kind host, Mr. Cruikshank, of the high-school here, and said to be one of the best Latins in this age, begs me to make you his grateful acknowledgments for the entertainment he has got in a Latin publication of yours, that I borrowed for him from your acquaintance and much respected friend in this place, the Reverend Dr. Webster.[2] Mr. Cruikshank maintains that you write the best Latin since Buchanan. I leave Edinburgh to-morrow, but shall return in three weeks. Your song you mentioned in your last, to the tune of "Dumbarton Drums," and the other, which you say was done by a brother in trade of mine, a ploughman, I shall thank you for a copy of each. I am ever, Reverend Sir, with the most respectful esteem and sincere veneration, yours,

R. B.

[1] Mr. Skinner's letter, to which this is an answer, will be found in a previous note.

TO RICHARD BROWN.

EDINBURGH, Feb. 15th, 1788.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I received yours with the greatest pleasure. I shall arrive at Glasgow on Monday evening; and beg, if possible, you will meet me on Tuesday. I shall wait for you Tuesday all day. I shall be found at Durie's Black Bull inn. I am hurried, as if hunted by fifty devils, else I should go to Greenock; but if you cannot possibly come, write me, if possible, to Glasgow, on Monday; or direct to me at Mossgiel by Mauchline; and name a day and place in Ayrshire, within a fortnight from this date, where I may meet you. I only stay a fortnight in Ayrshire, and return to Edinburgh. I am ever, my dearest friend, yours,

R. B.

TO MISS CHALMERS.

EDINBURGH, Sunday, Feb. 15th, 1788

To-morrow, my dear madam, I leave Edinburgh. I have altered all my plans of future life. A farm that I could live in, I could not

[2] An Episcopal clergyman in Edinburgh.

find: and, indeed, after the necessary support my brother and the rest of the family required, I could not venture on farming in that style suitable to my feelings. You will condemn me for the next step I have taken. I have entered into the Excise. I stay in the west about three weeks, and then return to Edinburgh for six weeks' instructions; afterwards, for I get employ instantly, I go *où il plait à Dieu et mon Roi*. I have chosen this, my dear friend, after mature deliberation. The question is not at what door of Fortune's Palace shall we enter in; but what doors does she open to us? I was not likely to get anything to do. I wanted *au but*, which is a dangerous, an unhappy situation. I got this without any hanging on, or mortifying solicitation. It is immediate bread, and, though poor in comparison of the last eighteen months of my existence, 'tis luxury in comparison of all my preceding life: besides, the Commissioners are some of them my acquaintances, and all of them my firm friends.

R. B.

TO MRS. ROSE OF KILRAVOCK.[1]

EDINBURGH, Feb. 17th, 1788.

MADAM,

You are much indebted to some indispensable business I have had on my hands, otherwise my gratitude threatened such a return for your obliging favour as would have tired your patience. It but poorly expresses my feelings to say, that I am sensible of your kindness: it may be said of hearts such as yours is, and such, I hope, mine is, much more justly than Addison applies it,—

"Some souls by instinct to each other turn.

There was something in my reception at Kilravock so different from the cold, obsequious, dancing school bow of politeness, that it almost got into my head that friendship had occupied her ground without the intermediate march of acquaintance. I wish I could transcribe, or rather transfuse into language, the glow of my heart when I read your letter. My ready fancy, with colours more mellow than life itself, painted the beautifully wild scenery of Kilravock—the venerable grandeur of the castle—the spreading woods—the winding river, gladly leaving its unsightly, heathy source, and lingering with apparent delight as he passes the

[1] Burns, in his Highland tour, visited Kilravock, Inverness-shire, and has recorded in his Journal the pleasure it afforded him (see vol. i. p. 181). As at Gordon Castle, he was hurried away from this place by his stubborn companion, Mr. Nicol. The following letter to the poet from the elder Mrs. Rose of Kilravock is alike admirable for its spirit, good sense, and kind feeling.

"SIR:

"I hope you will do me the justice to believe that it was no defect in gratitude for your punctual performance of your parting promise that has made me so long in acknowledging it, but merely the difficulty I had in getting the Highland songs you wished me to have accurately noted; they are at last inclosed, but how shall I convey along with them those graces they acquired from the melodious voice of one of the fair spirits of the hill of Kildrummie! These I must leave to your imagination to supply. It has powers sufficient to transport you to her side, to recall her accents, and to make them still vibrate in the ears of memory. To her I am indebted for getting the inclosed notes. They are clothed with 'thoughts that breathe, and words that burn.' These, however, being in an unknown tongue to you, you must again have recourse to that same fertile imagination of yours to interpret them, and suppose a lover's description of the beauties of an adored mistress. Why did I say unknown? The language of love is an universal one, that seems to have escaped the confusion of Babel, and to be understood by all nations.

"I rejoice to find that you were pleased with so many things, persons, and places in your northern tour, because it leads me to hope you may be induced to revisit them again. That the old castle of Kilravock, and its inhabitants, were amongst these, adds to my satisfaction. I am even vain enough to admit your very flattering application of the line of Addison: at anyrate allow me to believe that 'friendship will maintain the ground she has occupied, in both our hearts,' in spite of absence, and that when we do meet, it will be as acquaintance of a score of years' standing; and on this footing consider me as interested in the future course of your fame, so splendidly commenced. Any communications of the progress of your muse will be received with great gratitude, and the fire of your genius will have power to warm even us frozen sisters of the north.

"The firesides of Kilravock and Kildrummie unite in cordial regards to you. When you incline to figure either in your idea, suppose some of us reading your poems, and some of us singing your songs, and my little Hugh looking at your picture, and you'll seldom be wrong. We remember Mr. Nicol with as much good-will as we can do anybody who hurried Mr. Burns from us.

"Farewell, Sir! I can only contribute the *widow's mite* to the esteem and admiration excited by your merits and genius, but this I give as she [illegible] with all my heart—being sincerely yours,

"EL. ROSE."

fairy walk at the bottom of the garden;—your late distressful anxieties—your present enjoyments—your dear little angel,[1] the pride of your hopes:—my aged friend,[2] venerable in worth and years, whose loyalty and other virtues will strongly entitle her to the support of the Almighty Spirit here, and his peculiar favour in a happier state of existence. You cannot imagine, Madam, how much such feelings delight me; they are my dearest proofs of my own immortality. Should I never revisit the north, as probably I never will, nor again see your hospitable mansion, were I, some twenty years hence, to see your little fellow's name making a proper figure in a newspaper paragraph, my heart would bound with pleasure.

I am assisting a friend in a collection of Scottish songs, set to their proper tunes; every air worth preserving is to be included: among others I have given "Morag," and some few Highland airs which pleased me most, a dress which will be more generally known, though far, far inferior in real merit. As a small mark of my grateful esteem, I beg leave to present you with a copy of the work, so far as it is printed; the Man of Feeling,[3] that first of men, has promised to transmit it by the first opportunity.

I beg to be remembered most respectfully to my venerable friend, and to your little Highland chieftain. When you see the "two fair spirits of the hill," at Kildrummie,[4] tell them that I have done myself the honour of setting myself down as one of their admirers for at least twenty years to come, consequently they must look upon me as an acquaintance for the same period; but, as the Apostle Paul says, "this I ask of grace, not of debt." I have the honour to be, Madam, &c.

R. B.

[1] Hugh Rose, afterwards twentieth laird of Kilravock.

[2] Mrs. Rose's mother.

[3] Mr. Mackenzie's mother was a daughter of one of the lairds of Kilravock.

[4] Miss Sophia Brodie, and Miss Rose of Kilravock, mentioned in the poet's notes of his tour.

TO RICHARD BROWN.

MOSSGIEL, 24th Feb. 1788.

MY DEAR SIR,

I cannot get the proper direction for my friend in Jamaica, but the following will do:—To Mr. Jo. Hutchinson, at Jo. Brownrigg's, Esq., care of Mr. Benjamin Henriquez, merchant, Orange-street, Kingston. I arrived here, at my brother's, only yesterday, after fighting my way through Paisley and Kilmarnock, against those old powerful foes of mine, the devil, the world, and the flesh—so terrible in the fields of dissipation. I have met with few incidents in my life which gave me so much pleasure as meeting you in Glasgow. There is a time of life beyond which we cannot form a tie worth the name of friendship. "O youth! enchanting stage, profusely blest." Life is a fairy scene: almost all that deserves the name of enjoyment or pleasure is only a charming delusion; and in comes repining age, in all the gravity of hoary wisdom, and wretchedly chases away the bewitching phantom. When I think of life, I resolve to keep a strict look-out in the course of economy, for the sake of worldly convenience and independence of mind; to cultivate intimacy with a few of the companions of youth, that they may be the friends of age; never to refuse my liquorish humour a handful of the sweetmeats of life, when they come not too dear; and, for futurity,—

> The present moment is our ain,
> The neist we never saw!

How like you my philosophy? Give my best compliments to Mrs. B., and believe me to be, my dear Sir, yours most truly,

R. B.

TO MR. WILLIAM CRUICKSHANK.

MAUCHLINE, March 3d, 1788.

MY DEAR SIR,

Apologies for not writing are frequently like apologies for not singing—the apology better than the song. I have fought my way severely through the savage hospitality of this country, to send every guest drunk to bed if they can.

I executed your commission in Glasgow, and I hope the cocoa came safe. 'Twas the same price and the very same kind as your former

parcel, for the gentleman recollected your buying there perfectly well.

I should return my thanks for your——— hospitality (I leave a blank for the epithet, as I know none can do it justice) to a poor, wayfaring bard, who was spent and almost overpowered fighting with prosaic wickedness in high places; but I am afraid lest you should burn the letter whenever you come to the passage, so I pass over it in silence. I am just returned from visiting Mr. Miller's farm. The friend whom I told you I would take with me[1] was highly pleased with the farm; and as he is, without exception, the most intelligent farmer in the country, he has staggered me a good deal. I have the two plans of life before me; I shall balance them to the best of my judgment; and fix on the most eligible. I have written Mr. Miller, and shall wait on him when I come to town, which shall be the beginning or middle of next week: I would be in sooner, but my unlucky knee is rather worse, and I fear for some time will scarcely stand the fatigue of my Excise instructions. I only mention these ideas to you; and, indeed, except Mr. Ainslie, whom I intend writing to to-morrow, I will not write at all to Edinburgh till I return to it. I would send my compliments to Mr. Nicol, but he would be hurt if he knew I wrote to anybody and not to him: so I shall only beg my best, kindest, kindest compliments to my worthy hostess, and the sweet little Rose-bud.[2]

So soon as I am settled in the routine of life, either as an Excise-officer, or as a farmer, I propose myself great pleasure from a regular correspondence with the only man almost I ever saw who joined the most attentive prudence with the warmest generosity.

I am much interested for that best of men, Mr. Wood; I hope he is in better health and spirits than when I saw him last. I am ever, my dearest friend, your obliged, humble servant,

R. B.

[1] This was John Tennant of GlencONNER, father of the James Tennant to whom one of the poet's poetical epistles is addressed, beginning "Auld comrade dear," &c., see vol. iii. p. 25. His visit in company with this old friend is mentioned in next letter, as also in one to Robert Muir on following page.

[2] His correspondent's daughter, Miss Jenny Cruickshank, heroine of the song, "A Rose-bud by my early walk."

TO ROBERT AINSLIE, ESQ.

MAUCHLINE, 3d March, 1788.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I am just returned from Mr. Miller's farm. My old friend whom I took with me was highly pleased with the bargain, and advised me to accept of it. He is the most intelligent sensible farmer in the county, and his advice has staggered me a good deal. I have the two plans before me: I shall endeavour to balance them to the best of my judgment, and fix on the most eligible. On the whole, if I find Mr. Miller in the same favourable disposition as when I saw him last, I shall in all probability turn farmer.

I have been through sore tribulation and under much buffeting of the Wicked One since I came to this country. Jean I found banished, like a martyr—forlorn, destitute, and friendless: all for the good old cause: I have reconciled her to her fate: I have reconciled her to her mother: I have taken her a room: I have taken her to my arms: I have given her a mahogany bed: I have given her a guinea: and I have embraced her till she rejoiced with joy unspeakable and full of glory. But—as I always am on every occasion—I have been prudent and cautious to an astounding degree; I swore her privately and solemnly, never to attempt any claim on me as a husband, even though anybody should persuade her she had such a claim, which she had not, neither during my life nor after my death. She did all this like a good girl, and . . . O! what a peacemaker is &c., &c. . . .

I shall be in Edinburgh the middle of next week. My farming ideas I shall keep private till I see. I got a letter from Clarinda yesterday, and she tells me she has got no letter of mine but one. Tell her that I wrote to her from Glasgow, from Kilmarnock, from Mauchline, and yesterday from Cumnock as I returned from Dumfries. Indeed, she is the only person in Edinburgh I have written to till this day. How are your soul and body putting up?—a little like man and wife I suppose.

Your faithful friend,

R. B.

TO RICHARD BROWN.

MAUCHLINE, 7th March, 1788.

I have been out of the country, my dear friend, and have not had an opportunity of writing till now, when I am afraid you will be gone out of the country too. I have been looking at farms, and, after all, perhaps I may settle in the character of a farmer. I have got so vicious a bent to idleness, and have ever been so little a man of business, that it will take no ordinary effort to bring my mind properly into the routine: but you will say a "great effort is worthy of you." I say so myself; and butter up my vanity with all the stimulating compliments I can think of. Men of grave, geometrical minds, the sons of "which was to be demonstrated," may cry up reason as much as they please; but I have always found an honest passion, or native instinct, the truest auxiliary in the warfare of this world. Reason almost always comes to me like an unlucky wife to a poor devil of a husband, just in sufficient time to add her reproaches to his other grievances.

I found Jean with her cargo very well laid in, but unfortunately moored almost at the mercy of wind and tide. I have towed her into a convenient harbour, where she may lie snug till she unload, and have taken the command myself, not ostensibly, but for a time in secret. I am gratified with your kind inquiries after her; as, after all, I may say with Othello—

> Excellent wretch!
> Perdition catch my soul, but I do love thee!

I go for Edinburgh on Monday. Yours,

R. B.

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

MOSSGIEL, 7th March, 1788.

MADAM,

The last paragraph in yours of the 30th February affected me most, so I shall begin my answer where you ended your letter.[1] That I am often a sinner with any little wit I have, I do confess: but I have taxed my recollection to no purpose, to find out when it was employed against you. I hate an ungenerous sarcasm a great deal worse than I do the devil—at least as Milton describes him; and though I may be rascally enough to be sometimes guilty of it myself, I cannot endure it in others. You, my honoured friend, who cannot appear in any light but you are sure of being respectable—you can afford to pass by an occasion to display your wit, because you may depend for fame on your sense; or, if you choose to be silent, you know you can rely on the gratitude of many, and the esteem of all; but, God help us, who are wits or witlings by profession, if we stand not for fame there, we sink unsupported!

I am highly flattered by the news you tell me of Coila.[2] I may say to the fair painter who does me so much honour, as Dr. Beattie says to Ross the poet of his muse Scota, from which, by the bye, I took the idea of Coila ('tis a poem of Beattie's in the Scottish dialect, which perhaps you have never seen):—

Ye shake your head, but o' my fegs,	faith
Ye've set Auld Scota on her legs:	
Lang had she lien wi' beffs and flegs,	blows frights
Bumbaz'd and dizzie,	stupefied
Her fiddle wanted strings and pegs,	
Wae's me, poor hizzie.	wench

R. B.

TO MR. ROBERT MUIR.

MOSSGIEL, 7th March, 1788.

DEAR SIR,

I have partly changed my ideas, my dear friend, since I saw you. I took old Glenconner with me to Mr. Miller's farm, and he was so pleased with it, that I have wrote an offer to Mr. Miller, which, if he accepts, I shall sit down a plain farmer, the happiest of lives when a man can live by it. In this case I shall not stay in Edinburgh above a week. I set out on Monday, and would have come by Kilmarnock, but there are several small sums owing me for my first edition about Galston and Newmills, and I shall set off so early as to

[1] In that letter, according to Dr. Currie, Mrs. Dunlop intimated that she had been informed that the poet had ridiculed her.

[2] One of the daughters of Mrs. Dunlop (Rachel Dunlop, afterwards married to Robert Glasgow, Esq.) was at the time engaged in drawing a sketch of Coila from the poem of the "Vision." See p. 111, vol. ii.

despatch my business and reach Glasgow by night. When I return, I shall devote a forenoon or two to make some kind of acknowledgment for all the kindness I owe your friendship. Now that I hope to settle with some credit and comfort at home, there was not any friendship or friendly correspondence that promised me more pleasure than yours; I hope I will not be disappointed. I trust the spring will renew your shattered frame, and make your friends happy.[1] You and I have often agreed that life is no great blessing on the whole. The close of life, indeed, to a reasoning age, is,

> Dark as was chaos, ere the infant sun
> Was roll'd together, or had try'd his beams
> Athwart the gloom profound.

But an honest man has nothing to fear. If we lie down in the grave, the whole man a piece of broken machinery, to moulder with the clods of the valley, be it so; at least there is an end of pain, care, woes and wants: if that part of us called Mind does survive the apparent destruction of the man—away with old-wife prejudices and tales! Every age and every nation has had a different set of stories; and as the many are always weak of consequence, they have often, perhaps always, been deceived: a man conscious of having acted an honest part among his fellow-creatures—even granting that he may have been the sport at times of passions and instincts—he goes to a great unknown Being, who could have no other end in giving him existence but to make him happy, who gave him those passions and instincts, and well knows their force.

These, my worthy friend, are my ideas; and I know they are not far different from yours. It becomes a man of sense to think for himself, particularly in a case where all men are equally interested, and where, indeed, all men are equally in the dark.

Those copies of mine you have on hand: please send ten of them to Mr. John Ballantine of the Bank in Ayr; for the remainder I will write you about them from Glasgow.

Adieu, my dear Sir; God send us a cheerful meeting!

R. B.

[1] "April 22, 1788.—Died at Kilmarnock, Mr. Robert Muir of Loanfoot."—*Scots Magazine.*

TO [MR. WILLIAM NICOL,

EDINBURGH?][2]

MAUCHLINE, 7th March, 1788.

MY DEAR SIR,

My life, since I saw you last, has been one continued hurry; that savage hospitality which knocks a man down with strong liquors, is the devil. I have a sore warfare in this world: the devil, the world, and the flesh, are three formidable foes. The first I generally try to fly from; the second, alas! generally flies from me; but the third is my plague, worse than the ten plagues of Egypt.

I have been looking over several farms in this country; one, in particular, in Nithsdale, pleased me so well, that if my offer to the proprietor is accepted, I shall commence farmer at Whitsunday.[3] If farming do not appear eligible, I shall have recourse to my other shift; but this to a friend.

I set out for Edinburgh on Monday morning; how long I stay there is uncertain, but you will know so soon as I can inform you myself. However, I determine poesy must be laid aside for some time; my mind has been vitiated with idleness, and it will take a good deal of effort to habituate it to the routine of business.

I am, my dear Sir, yours sincerely,

R. B.

TO MISS CHALMERS.

EDINBURGH, March 14th, 1788.

I know, my ever dear friend, that you will be pleased with the news when I tell you, I have at last taken a lease of a farm. Yesternight I completed a bargain with Mr. Miller, of Dalswinton, for the farm of Ellisland, on the banks of the Nith, between five and six

[2] The address of this letter has been torn off, and it cannot be stated with certainty to whom it was written. Cunningham assigns it to Ainslie, but this is unlikely, as Burns had written him but four days previously giving much about the same information. Mr. Scott Douglas suggests Nicol, Dunbar, Cleghorn, or Alexander Cunningham, giving the preference to the first, with some degree of probability.

[3] The lease of Ellisland was signed on the 13th March, 1788.

miles above Dumfries. I begin at Whit-Sunday to build a house, drive lime, &c.; and heaven be my help! for it will take a strong effort to bring my mind into the routine of business. I have discharged all the army of my former pursuits, fancies, and pleasures; a motley host! and have literally and strictly retained only the ideas of a few friends, which I have incorporated into a life-guard. I trust in Dr. Johnson's observation, "Where much is attempted, something is done." Firmness, both in sufferance and exertion, is a character I would wish to be thought to possess: and have always despised the whining yelp of complaint, and the cowardly, feeble resolve.

Poor Miss K.[1] is ailing a good deal this winter, and begged me to remember her to you the first time I wrote to you. Surely woman, amiable woman, is often made in vain. Too delicately formed for the rougher pursuits of ambition; too noble for the dirt of avarice, and even too gentle for the rage of pleasure; formed indeed for, and highly susceptible of enjoyment and rapture; but that enjoyment, alas! almost wholly at the mercy of the caprice, malevolence, stupidity, or wickedness of an animal at all times comparatively unfeeling, and often brutal.

R. B.

TO RICHARD BROWN.

GLASGOW, 26th March, 1788.

I am monstrously to blame, my dear Sir, in not writing to you, and sending you the Directory. I have been getting my tack extended, as I have taken a farm; and I have been racking shop accounts with Mr. Creech, both of which, together with watching, fatigue, and a load of care almost too heavy for my shoulders, have in some degree actually fevered me. I really forgot the Directory yesterday, which vexed me; but I was convulsed with rage a great part of the day. I have to thank you for the ingenious, friendly, and elegant epistle from your friend Mr. Crawford. I shall certainly write to him, but not now. This is merely a card to you, as I am posting to Dumfries-shire, where many perplexing arrangements await me. I am vexed about the Directory; but, my dear Sir, forgive me: these eight days I have been positively crazed. My compliments to Mrs. B. I shall write to you at Grenada.—I am ever, my dearest friend, yours,

R. B.

[1] Miss Kennedy, who was a sister of Gavin Hamilton, and who, notwithstanding the feeble state of health which induced the poet to commiserate her as above, survived him nearly forty years, being considerably over ninety when she died.

TO MR. ROBERT CLEGHORN.[2]

MAUCHLINE, 31st March, 1788.

Yesterday, my dear Sir, as I was riding through a tract of melancholy, joyless muirs, between Galloway and Ayrshire, it being Sunday, I turned my thoughts to psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs; and your favourite air, "Captain O'Kean," coming at length into my head, I tried these words to it. You will see that the first part of the tune must be repeated.

The small birds rejoice in the green leaves returning, &c.

["The Chevalier's Lament," vol. ii. p. 249.]

I am tolerably pleased with these verses, but as I have only a sketch of the tune, I leave it with you to try if they suit the measure of the music.

[2] Mr. Cleghorn's answer to the above letter was as follows. The advice which it contains with regard to the verses sent him was adopted, and an additional stanza was written, which now forms the second of "The Chevalier's Lament."

"SAUGHTON MILLS, April 27th, 1788.

"SIR,

"I was favoured with your very kind letter of the 31st ult., and consider myself greatly obliged to you for your attention in sending me the song to my favourite air, *Captain O'Kean*. The words delight me much—they fit the tune to a hair. I wish you would send me a verse or two more; and if you have no objection, I would have it in the Jacobite style. Suppose it should be sung after the fatal field of Culloden, by the unfortunate Charles. Tenducci personates the lovely Mary Stuart in the song, 'Queen Mary's Lamentation.' Why may not I sing in the person of her great-great-great grandson?

"Any skill I have in country business you may truly command. Situation, soil, customs of countries, may vary from each other; but *Farmer Attention* is a good farmer in every place. Mrs. Cleghorn joins me in best compliments. I am, in the most comprehensive sense of the word, your very sincere friend,

"ROBERT CLEGHORN."

I am so harassed with care and anxiety, about this farming project of mine, that my muse has degenerated into the veriest prose-wench that ever picked cinders, or followed a tinker. When I am fairly got into the routine of business, I shall trouble you with a longer epistle; perhaps with some queries respecting farming; at present, the world sits such a load on my mind that it has effaced almost every trace of the poet in me.

My very best compliments and good wishes to Mrs. Cleghorn.

R. B.

TO [GAVIN HAMILTON?][1]

MOSSGIEL, Friday Morning.

SIR,

The language of refusal is to me the most difficult language on earth, and you are the [only] man of the world, excepting one of Rt. Hon. designation, to whom it gives me the greatest pain to hold such language. My brother has already got money, and shall want nothing in my power to enable him to fulfil his engagement with you; but to be security on so large a scale, even for a brother, is what I dare not do, except I were in such circumstances of life as that the worst that might happen could not greatly injure me.

I never wrote a letter which gave me so much pain in my life, as I know the unhappy consequences; I shall incur the displeasure of a gentleman for whom I have the highest respect, and to whom I am deeply obliged.

I am ever, Sir, your obliged and very humble servant,

R. B.

[1] The above letter has neither address nor date, but it seems to have been written early in April, 1788, to Gavin Hamilton, who, before granting Gilbert Burns the desired lease of the farm of Mossgiel, appears to have proposed that the poet should put his name to the deed as security for his brother's rent. It is supposed to have been written shortly before Burns obtained a settlement with his publisher, Creech, which was not till April, 1788. Before this, as previous letters show, he considered his affairs to be in a very distracted state. On his settling with Creech, it is well known how generously he behaved towards his brother, by advancing to him £180 out of the £500 or £600 which he received. After this advance, the security mentioned in the letter would not, it is thought, be required.

TO MISS CHALMERS.

MAUCHLINE, 7th April, 1788.

I am indebted to you and Miss Nimmo for letting me know Miss Kennedy. Strange! how apt we are to indulge prejudices in our judgments of one another! Even I, who pique myself on my skill in marking characters—because I am too proud of my character as a man to be dazzled in my judgment for glaring wealth, and too proud of my situation as a poor man to be biassed against squalid poverty—I was unacquainted with Miss K.'s very uncommon worth.

I am going on a good deal progressive in *mon grand but*, the sober science of life. I have lately made some sacrifices, for which, were I *viva voce* with you to paint the situation and recount the circumstances, you would applaud me.[2]

R. B.

TO MR. WILLIAM DUNBAR, W.S.,[3]

EDINBURGH.

MAUCHLINE, 7th April, 1788.

I have not delayed so long to write you, my much respected friend, because I thought no farther of my promise. I have long since given up that kind of formal correspondence, where one sits down irksomely to write a letter, because we think we are in duty bound so to do.

I have been roving over the country, as my farm I have taken is forty miles from this place, hiring servants and preparing matters; but most of all, I am earnestly busy to bring about a revolution in my own mind.—As, till within these eighteen months, I never was the wealthy master of ten guineas, my knowledge of business is to learn; add to this, my late scenes of idleness and dissipation have enervated my mind to an alarming degree. Skill in the sober science of life is my most serious and hourly study. I have dropt all

[2] The "sacrifices" here alluded to were in all probability his resolution to cast all thoughts of union with dainty ladies like Peggy Chalmers and Clarinda to the winds, and to give his Jean that verbal, however private, acknowledgment as his wife, which in Scotland binds man to woman for all legal purposes.

[3] See p. 58.

conversation and all reading (prose reading) but what tends in some way or other to my serious aim. Except one worthy young fellow, I have not one single correspondent in Edinburgh. You have indeed kindly made me an offer of that kind. The world of wits, and *gens comme il faut* which I lately left, and with whom I never again will intimately mix, —from that port, Sir, I expect your Gazette: what *les beaux esprits* are saying, what they are doing, and what they are singing. Any sober intelligence from my sequestered walks of life; any droll original; any passing remark, important, forsooth, because it is mine; any little poetic effort, however embryotic; these, my dear Sir, are all you have to expect from me. When I talk of poetic efforts, I must have it always understood, that I appeal from your wit and taste to your friendship and good nature. The first would be my favourite tribunal, where I defied censure; but the last, where I declined justice.

I have scarcely made a single distich since I saw you. When I meet with an old Scotch air, that has any facetious idea in its name, I have a peculiar pleasure in following out that idea for a verse or two.

I trust that this will find you in better health than I did last time I called for you. A few lines from you, directed to me, at Mauchline, were it but to let me know how you are, will ease my mind a good deal. Now, never shun the idea of writing me because perhaps you may be out of humour or spirits. I could give you a hundred good consequences attending a dull letter; one, for example, and the remaining ninety-nine some other time; it will always serve to keep in countenance, my much respected Sir,

Your obliged friend, and humble servant,

R. B.

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

MAUCHLINE, 28th April, 1788.

MADAM,

Your powers of reprehension must be great indeed, as I assure you they made my heart ache with penitential pangs, even though I was really not guilty. As I commence farmer at Whitsunday, you will easily guess I must be pretty busy; but that is not all. As I got the offer of the Excise business without solicitation, and as it cost me only six weeks' attendance for instructions, to entitle me to a commission—which commission lies by me, and at any future period, on my simple petition, can be resumed—I thought five-and-thirty pounds a-year was no bad dernier resort for a poor poet, if Fortune in her jade tricks should kick him down from the little eminence to which she has lately helped him up.

For this reason I am at present attending these instructions, to have them completed before Whitsunday. Still, Madam, I prepared with the sincerest pleasure to meet you at the Mount, and came to my brother's on Saturday night, to set out on Sunday; but for some nights preceding I had slept in an apartment, where the force of the winds and rains was only mitigated by being sifted through numberless apertures in the windows, walls, &c. In consequence I was on Sunday, Monday, and part of Tuesday, unable to stir out of bed, with all the miserable effects of a violent cold.

You see, Madam, the truth of the French maxim, *le vrai n'est pas toujours le vrai-semblable;* your last was so full of expostulation, and was something so like the language of an offended friend, that I began to tremble for a correspondence, which I had with grateful pleasure set down as one of the greatest enjoyments of my future life.

Your books have delighted me: Virgil, Dryden, and Tasso were all equally strangers to me; but of this more at large in my next.

R. B.

TO MR. JAMES SMITH,[1]

AVON PRINTFIELD, LINLITHGOW.

MAUCHLINE, April 28th, 1788.

Beware of your Strasburgh, my good Sir! Look on this as the opening of a correspondence, like the opening of a twenty-four gun battery!

There is no understanding a man properly, without knowing something of his previous ideas: that is to say, if the man has any ideas;

[1] The poet's old Mauchline friend, now a resident in Linlithgow, and partner in the Avon print-works there.

for I know many who, in the animal-muster, pass for men, that are the scanty masters of only one idea, on any given subject, and by far the greatest part of your acquaintances and mine can barely boast of ideas, 1·25—1·5—1·75 (or some such fractional matter), so to let you a little into the secrets of my pericranium, there is, you must know, a certain clean-limbed, handsome, bewitching young hussy of your acquaintance, to whom I have lately and privately given a matrimonial title to my corpus.

Bode a robe and wear it,
Bode a pock and bear it;

says the wise old Scots adage! I hate to presage ill-luck; and as my girl has been doubly kinder to me than even the best of women usually are to their partners of our sex, in similar circumstances, I reckon on twelve times a brace of children against I celebrate my twelfth wedding-day: these twenty-four will give me twenty-four gossippings, twenty-four christenings (I mean one equal to two), and I hope, by the blessing of the God of my fathers, to make them twenty-four dutiful children to their parents, twenty-four useful members of society, and twenty-four approved servants to their God! . . .

"Light's heartsome," quo' the wife when she was stealing sheep. You see what a lamp I have hung up to lighten your paths, when you are idle enough to explore the combinations and relations of my ideas. 'Tis now as plain as a pike-staff, why a twenty-four gun battery was a metaphor I could readily employ.

Now for business.—I intend to present Mrs. Burns with a printed shawl, an article of which I dare say you have variety: 'tis my first present to her since I have irrevocably called her mine, and I have a kind of whimsical wish to get her the first said present from an old and much valued friend of hers and mine, a trusty Trojan, on whose friendship I count myself possessed of as a life-rent lease.

Look on this letter as a "beginning of sorrows;" I will write you till your eyes ache reading nonsense.

Mrs. Burns ('tis only her private designation) begs her best compliments to you.

R. B.

TO PROFESSOR DUGALD STEWART.

MAUCHLINE, 3d May, 1788.

SIR,

I inclose you one or two more of my bagatelles. If the fervent wishes of honest gratitude have any influence with that great, unknown Being who frames the chain of causes and events, prosperity and happiness will attend your visit to the continent, and return you safe to your native shore.

Wherever I am, allow me, Sir, to claim it as my privilege to acquaint you with my progress in my trade of rhymes; as I am sure I could say it with truth, that, next to my little fame, and the having it in my power to make life more comfortable to those whom nature has made dear to me, I shall ever regard your countenance, your patronage, your friendly good offices, as the most valued consequence of my late success in life. I have the honour to be, most truly, Sir, your much indebted humble servant,

R. B.

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

MAUCHLINE, 4th May, 1788.

MADAM,

Dryden's Virgil has delighted me. I do not know whether the critics will agree with me, but the Georgics are to me by far the best of Virgil. It is indeed a species of writing entirely new to me; and has filled my head with a thousand fancies of emulation: but, alas! when I read the Georgics, and then survey my own powers, 'tis like the idea of a Shetland pony, drawn up by the side of a thorough-bred hunter, to start for the plate. I own I am disappointed in the Æneid. Faultless correctness may please, and does highly please, the lettered critic: but to that awful character I have not the most distant pretensions. I do not know whether I do not hazard my pretensions to be a critic of any kind when I say that I think Virgil, in many instances, a servile copier of Homer. If I had the Odyssey by me, I could parallel many passages where Virgil has evidently copied, but by no means improved, Homer. Nor can I think there is anything of this owing to the translators; for, from everything I have seen

of Dryden, I think him, in genius and fluency of language, Pope's master. I have not perused Tasso enough to form an opinion: in some future letter, you shall have my ideas of him; though I am conscious my criticisms must be very inaccurate and imperfect, as there I have ever felt and lamented my want of learning most.

R. B.

TO MR. SAMUEL BROWN.[1]

MOSSGIEL, 4th May, 1788.

DEAR UNCLE,

This, I hope, will find you and your conjugal yoke-fellow in your good old way. I am impatient to know if the Ailsa fowling be commenced for this season yet, as I want three or four stones of feathers, and I hope you will bespeak them for me. It would be a vain attempt for me to enumerate the various transactions I have been engaged in since I saw you last, but this know,—I am engaged in a *smuggling trade*, and God knows if ever any poor man experienced better returns, two for one; but as freight and delivery have turned out so dear, I am thinking of taking out a license and beginning in fair trade. I have taken a farm on the borders of the Nith, and in imitation of the old patriarchs, get men-servants and maid-servants, and flocks and herds, and beget sons and daughters.

Your obedient Nephew,

R. B.

TO MR. JAMES JOHNSON, ENGRAVER,

EDINBURGH.

MAUCHLINE, 25th May, 1788.

MY DEAR SIR,

I am really uneasy about that money which Mr. Creech owes me per note in your hand, and I want it much at present, as I am engaged in business pretty deeply both for myself and my brother. A hundred guineas can be but a trifling affair to him, and 'tis a matter of most serious importance to me.[2] To-morrow I begin my operations as a farmer, and God speed the plough!

I am so enamoured of a certain girl's prolific, twin-bearing merit, that I have given her a legal title to the best blood in my body, and so farewell raking! To be serious, I found I had a long and much-loved fellow-creature's happiness or misery in my hands; and though Pride and seeming Justice were murderous King's Advocates on the one side, yet Humanity, Generosity, and Forgiveness, were such powerful, such irresistible council on the other side that a jury of all endearments and new attachments brought in a unanimous verdict—*Not Guilty!* And the Panel, be it known to all whom it concerns, is installed and instated into all the rights, privileges, immunities, franchises, services and paraphernalia that at present do, or at any time coming may, belong to the name, title, and designation . . .[3]

Present my best compliments to . . .

TO MR. ROBERT AINSLIE.

MAUCHLINE, May 26th, 1788.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I am two kind letters in your debt; but I have been from home, and horridly busy, buying and preparing for my farming business, over and above the plague of my Excise instructions, which this week will finish.

As I flatter my wishes that I foresee many future years' correspondence between us, 'tis foolish to talk of excusing dull epistles; a dull letter may be a very kind one. I have the pleasure to tell you that I have been extremely fortunate in all my buyings and bargainings hitherto; Mrs. Burns not excepted; which title I now avow to the world. I am truly pleased with this last affair: it has indeed added to my anxieties for futurity, but it has given a stability to my mind and resolutions unknown before; and the poor girl has the most sacred enthusiasm of attachment to me,

[1] Brother to the poet's mother. It was with him that Burns lodged during the summer of 1776 while at Roger's learning mathematics, &c. (see vol. i. p. 24). It is to be observed, that the nephew writes to the uncle in a very *frank* style. Old Samuel must have been no square-toes.

[2] On the 23d October, 1787, Creech granted Burns a promissory note for 100 guineas for the property of the poems. This note was by the poet handed over to Johnson to be presented for payment six months after date. Burns's signature as having received payment is followed by the date 30th May, 1788.

[3] The MS. is torn here.

and has not a wish but to gratify my every idea of her deportment. I am interrupted. Farewell! my dear Sir.

ROBT. BURNS.

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

MAUCHLINE, 27th May, 1788.

MADAM,

I have been torturing my philosophy to no purpose, to account for that kind partiality of yours, which unlike . . . , has followed me, in my return to the shade of life, with assiduous benevolence. Often did I regret, in the fleeting hours of my late will-o'-wisp appearance, that "here I had no continuing city;" and, but for the consolation of a few solid guineas, could almost lament the time that a momentary acquaintance with wealth and splendour put me so much out of conceit with the sworn companions of my road through life—insignificance and poverty. . . .

There are few circumstances relating to the unequal distribution of the good things of this life that give me more vexation (I mean in what I see around me) than the importance the opulent bestow on their trifling family affairs, compared with the very same things on the contracted scale of a cottage. Last afternoon I had the honour to spend an hour or two at a good woman's fire-side, where the planks that composed the floor were decorated with a splendid carpet, and the gay table sparkled with silver and china. 'Tis now about term-day, and there has been a revolution among those creatures,[1] who, though in appearance partakers, and equally noble partakers, of the same nature with Madame, are from time to time—their nerves, their sinews, their health, strength, wisdom, experience, genius, time, nay a good part of their very thoughts—sold for months and years, not only to the necessities, the conveniences, but the caprices of the important few. We talked of the insignificant creatures; nay, notwithstanding their general stupidity and rascality, did some of the poor devils the honour to commend them. But light be the turf upon his breast who taught, "Reverence thyself!" We looked down on the unpolished wretches, their impertinent wives and clouterly brats, as the lordly bull does on the little dirty ant-hill, whose puny inhabitants he crushes in the carelessness of his ramble, or tosses in the air in the wantonness of his pride.

R. B.

[1] The poet here alludes to the hiring-season of servants, which in Scotland occurs half-yearly—Whitsunday, and Martinmas.

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

AT MR. DUNLOP'S, HADDINGTON.

ELLISLAND, 13th [14th] June, 1788.[2]

Where'er I roam, whatever realms I see,
My heart untravell'd, fondly turns to thee;
Still to my friend it turns with ceaseless pain,
And drags, at each remove, a lengthen'd chain.
GOLDSMITH.

This is the second day, my honoured friend, that I have been on my farm. A solitary inmate of an old, smoky spence [parlour]; far from every object I love, or by whom I am beloved; nor any acquaintance older than yesterday, except Jenny Geddes, the old mare I ride on; while uncouth cares and novel plans hourly insult my awkward ignorance and bashful inexperience. There is a foggy atmosphere native to my soul in the hour of care; consequently the dreary objects seem larger than the life. Extreme sensibility, irritated and prejudiced on the gloomy side by a series of misfortunes and disappointments, at that period of my existence when the soul is laying in her cargo of ideas for the voyage of life, is, I believe, the principal cause of this unhappy frame of mind.

The valiant, in himself, what can he suffer?
Or what need he regard his *single* woes? &c.

Your surmise, Madam, is just; I am indeed a husband. . . . I found a once much-loved, and still much-loved female, literally and truly cast out to the mercy of the naked elements; but as I enabled her to *purchase* a shelter; and there is no sporting with a fellow-creature's happiness or misery. . . . The most placid good-nature and sweetness of disposition; a warm heart, gratefully devoted with all its powers to love me; vigorous health

[2] Burns is a day too early in his dates in this and the next letter; he arrived at Ellisland on the 13th, consequently his "second day" would have been the 14th June.

and sprightly cheerfulness, set off to the best advantage by a more than commonly handsome figure; these, I think, in a woman, may make a good wife, though she should never have read a page but the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament, nor have danced in a brighter assembly than a penny-pay wedding.

R. B.

TO MR. ROBERT AINSLIE.

ELLISLAND, June 14th [15th], 1788.

This is now the third day, my dearest Sir, that I have sojourned in these regions; and during these three days you have occupied more of my thoughts than in three weeks preceding; in Ayrshire I have several variations of friendship's compass: here it points invariably to the pole. My farm gives me a good many uncouth cares and anxieties, but I hate the language of complaint. Job, or some one of his friends, says well—"Why should a living man complain?"

I have lately been much mortified with contemplating an unlucky imperfection in the very framing and construction of my soul; namely, a blundering inaccuracy of her olfactory organs in hitting the scent of craft or design in my fellow-creatures. I do not mean any compliment to my ingenuousness, or to hint that the defect is in consequence of the unsuspicious simplicity of conscious truth and honour: I take it to be, in some way or other, an imperfection in the mental sight; or, metaphor apart, some modification of dulness. In two or three instances lately, I have been most shamefully out.

I have all along hitherto, in the warfare of life, been bred to arms among the light-horse, the piquet guards of fancy, a kind of hussars and Highlanders of the brain; but I am firmly resolved to sell out of these giddy battalions, who have no ideas of a battle but fighting the foe, or of a siege but storming the town. Cost what it will, I am determined to buy in among the grave squadrons of heavy-armed thought, or the artillery corps of plodding contrivance.

What books are you reading, or what is the subject of your thoughts, besides the great studies of your profession? You said something about religion in your last. I don't exactly remember what it was, as the letter is in Ayrshire; but I thought it not only prettily said, but nobly thought. You will make a noble fellow if once you were married. I make no reservation of your being well married; you have so much sense and knowledge of human nature, that though you may not realize perhaps the ideas of romance, yet you will never be ill-married.[1]

Were it not for the terrors of my ticklish situation respecting provision for a family of children, I am decidedly of opinion that the step I have taken is vastly for my happiness.[2] As it is, I look to the Excise scheme as a certainty of maintenance; a maintenance!—luxury to what either Mrs. Burns or I were born to. Adieu.

R. B.

TO MR. ROBERT AINSLIE.

MAUCHLINE, 23rd June, 1788.

This letter, my dear Sir, is only a business scrap. Mr. Miers, profile painter in your town, has executed a profile of Dr. Blacklock for me: do me the favour to call for it, and sit to him yourself for me, which put in the same size as the doctor's. The account of both profiles will be fifteen shillings, which I have given to James Connel, our Mauchline carrier, to pay you when you give him the parcel. You must not, my friend, refuse to sit. The time is short; when I sat to Mr. Miers, I am sure he did not exceed two minutes. I propose hanging Lord Glencairn, the doctor, and you in trio over my new chimney-piece that is to be. Adieu.

R. B.

TO MR. ROBERT AINSLIE.

ELLISLAND, 30th June, 1788.

MY DEAR SIR,

I just now received your brief epistle; and, to take vengeance on your laziness, I have, you see, taken a long sheet of writing paper, and have begun at the top of the page, intending to scribble on to the very last corner.

[1] In December, 1798, Ainslie married Miss Jean Cunningham, daughter of Lieut.-col. Cunningham of the Scots Brigade.

[2] Alluding to his marriage.

I am vexed at that affair of the . . . , but dare not enlarge on the subject until you send me your direction, as I suppose that will be altered on your late master and friend's death.[1] I am concerned for the old fellow's exit, only as I fear it may be to your disadvantage in any respect—for an old man's dying, except he may have been a very benevolent character, or in some particular situation of life that the welfare of the poor or the helpless depended on him, I think it an event of the most trifling moment to the world. Man is naturally a kind, benevolent animal, but he is dropped into such a needy situation here, in this vexatious world, and has such a whore-son, hungry, growling, multiplying pack of necessities, appetites, passions, and desires about him, ready to devour him for want of other food; that in fact he must lay aside his cares for others that he may look properly to himself.

You have been imposed upon in paying Mr. Miers for the profile of a Mr. H. I did not mention it in my letter to you, nor did I ever give Mr. Miers any such order. I have no objection to lose the money, but I will not have any such profile in my possession.

I desired the carrier to pay you, but as I mentioned only 15*s.* to him, I will rather enclose you a guinea-note. I have it not, indeed, to spare here, as I am only a sojourner in a strange land in this place; but in a day or two I return to Mauchline, and there I have the bank notes through the house like salt permits.

There is a great degree of folly in talking unnecessarily of one's private affairs. I have just now been interrupted by one of my new neighbours, who has made himself absolutely contemptible in my eyes, by his silly, garrulous prurience. I know it has been a fault of my own, too; but from this moment I abjure it as I would the service of hell! Your poets, spendthrifts, and other fools of that kidney, pretend, forsooth, to crack their jokes on prudence; but 'tis a squalid vagabond glorying in his rags. Still, imprudence respecting money matters is much more pardonable than imprudence respecting character. I have no objection to prefer prodigality to avarice, in some few instances; but I appeal to your observation, if you have not met, and often met, with the same disingenuousness, the same hollow-hearted insincerity and disintegrative depravity of principle, in the hackneyed victims of profusion, as in the unfeeling children of parsimony. I have every possible reverence for the much-talked-of world beyond the grave, and I wish that that which piety believes, and virtue deserves, may be all matter of fact. But in things belonging to, and terminating in this present scene of existence, man has serious and interesting business on hand. Whether a man shall shake hands with welcome in the distinguished elevation of respect, or shrink from contempt in the abject corner of insignificance; whether he shall wanton under the tropic of plenty, at least enjoy himself in the comfortable latitudes of easy convenience, or starve in the arctic circle of dreary poverty: whether he shall rise in the manly conscientiousness of a self-approving mind, or sink beneath a galling load of regret and remorse, —these are alternatives of the last moment.

You see how I preach. You used occasionally to sermonize too; I wish you would, in charity, favour me with a sheet-full in your own way. I admire the close of a letter Lord Bolingbroke writes to Dean Swift:—"Adieu, dear Swift! with all thy faults, I love thee entirely: make an effort to love me with all mine!" Humble servant, and all that trumpery, is now such a prostituted business, that honest friendship, in her sincere way, must have recourse to her primitive, simple—farewell!

R. B.

[1] Mr. Samuel Mitchelson, W.S., under whom Ainslie served, died on the 21st June, 1788.

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

MAUCHLINE, July 10th, 1788.

MY MUCH HONOURED FRIEND,

Yours of the 24th June is before me. I found it, as well as another valued friend—my wife, waiting to welcome me to Ayrshire: I met both with the sincerest pleasure.

When I write you, Madam, I do not sit down to answer every paragraph of yours, by echoing every sentiment, like the faithful Commons of Great Britain in Parliament assembled, answering a speech from the best of kings! I express myself in the fulness of my

heart, and may, perhaps, be guilty of neglecting some of your kind inquiries; but not from your very odd reason, that I do not read your letters. All your epistles for several months have cost me nothing, except a swelling throb of gratitude, or a deep-felt sentiment of veneration.

Mrs. Burns, Madam, is the identical woman. . . . When she first found herself "as women wish to be who love their lords," as I loved her nearly to distraction, we took steps for a private marriage. Her parents got the hint; and not only forbade me her company and their house, but, on my rumoured West Indian voyage, got a warrant to put me in jail, till I should find security in my about-to-be paternal relation. You know my lucky reverse of fortune. On my *éclatant* return to Mauchline, I was made very welcome to visit my girl. The usual consequences began to betray her; and, as I was at that time laid up a cripple in Edinburgh, she was turned, literally turned, out of doors, and I wrote to a friend to shelter her till my return, when our marriage was declared. Her happiness or misery were in my hands, and who could trifle with such a deposit?

To jealousy or infidelity I am an equal stranger. My preservative against the first is the most thorough consciousness of her sentiments of honour, and her attachment to me: my antidote against the last, is my long and deep rooted affection for her. I can easily *fancy* a more agreeable companion for my journey of life; but, upon my honour, I have never *seen* that individual instance. In household matters, of aptness to learn, and activity to execute, she is eminently mistress; and during my absence in Nithsdale, she is regularly and constantly apprentice to my mother and sisters in their dairy and other rural business. The Muses must not be offended when I tell them, the concerns of my wife and family will, in my mind always take the *pas;* but I assure them their ladyships will ever come next in place. You are right, that a bachelor state would have insured me more friends; but from a cause you will easily guess, conscious peace in the enjoyment of my own mind, and unmistrusting confidence in approaching my God, would seldom have been of the number.

Circumstanced as I am, I could never have got a female partner for life, who could have entered into my favourite studies, relished my favourite authors, &c., without probably entailing on me at the same time expensive living, fantastic caprice, perhaps apish affectation, with all the other blessed boarding-school acquirements, which (*pardonnez moi, Madame,*) are sometimes to be found among females of the upper ranks, but almost universally pervade the misses of the would-be gentry.

I like your way in your church-yard lucubrations. Thoughts that are the spontaneous result of accidental situations, either respecting health, place, or company, have often a strength, and always an originality, that would in vain be looked for in fancied circumstances and studied paragraphs. For me, I have often thought of keeping a letter, in progression by me, to send you when the sheet was written out. Now I talk of sheets, I must tell you, my reason for writing to you on paper of this kind is my pruriency of writing to you at large. A page of post is on such a dis-social, narrow-minded scale, that I cannot abide it; and double letters, at least in my miscellaneous reverie manner, are a monstrous tax in a close correspondence.

R. B.

TO MR. PETER HILL,[1]

BOOKSELLER, EDINBURGH.

MAUCHLINE, 18th July, 1788.

You injured me, my dear Sir, in your construction of the cause of my silence. From Ellisland in Nithsdale to Mauchline in Kyle is forty and five miles. *There*, a house a-building, and farm enclosures, and improvements to tend; *here*, a new—not so much indeed a *new* as a young wife; good God, Sir, could my dearest brother expect a regular correspondence from me! I who am busied with the sacred pen of Nature, in the mystic volume of Creation—can I dishonour my hand with a dirty goose-feather, on a parcel of mashed old rags? I who am "called as was Aaron," to

[1] "Mr. Peter Hill, who had been Creech's chief assistant last year, was now set up in business for himself, with the afterwards-famous Archibald Constable as his apprentice."—CHAMBERS. See p. 60.

offer in the *sanctum sanctorum*, not indeed the mysterious, bloody types of future MURDER, but the thrice-hallowed quintessences of future EXISTENCE—can I—but I have apologized enough. I am certain that you, my liberal-minded and much respected friend, would have acquitted me, though I had obeyed to the very letter that famous statute among the irrevocable degrees of the Medes and Persians, "not to ask petition for forty days of either God or man, save thee, O Queen, only!"

I am highly obliged to you, my dearest Sir, for your kind, your elegant compliments on my becoming one of that most respectable, that most truly venerable corps, they who are, without a metaphor, the fathers of posterity, the benefactors of all coming generations; the editors of Spiritual Nature, and the authors of Immortal Being. Now that I am "one of you" I shall humbly but fervently endeavour to be a conspicuous member. Now it is called to-day with my powers and me, and the time fast approacheth when, beholding the debilitated victim of all-subduing Time, they shall exclaim, "How are the mighty fallen, and the weapons of war perished!"

Your book came safe, and I am going to trouble you with further commissions. I call it troubling you because I want only BOOKS; the cheapest way, the best; so you may have to hunt for them in the evening auctions. I want Smollett's works for the sake of his incomparable humour. I have already Roderick Random, and Humphrey Clinker.—Peregrine Pickle, Lancelot Greaves, and Ferdinand Count Fathom I still want; but as I said, the veriest ordinary copies will serve me. I am only nice in the appearance of my poets. I forget the price of Cowper's Poems, but I believe I must have them. I saw the other day, proposals for a publication, entitled "Banks's new and complete Christian's Family Bible," printed for C. Cooke, Paternoster Row, London.—He promises at least to give in the work, I think it is three hundred and odd engravings, to which he has put the names of the first artists in London. You will know the character of the performance, as some numbers of it are published; and if it is really what it pretends to be, set me down as a subscriber, and send me the published numbers.

Let me hear from you your first leisure minute, and trust me, you shall in future have no reason to complain of my silence. The dazzling perplexity of novelty will dissipate, and leave me to pursue my course in the quiet path of methodical routine.

I might go on to fill up the page, but I dare say you are already sufficiently tired of, my dear Sir, yours sincerely,

R. B.

TO MR. GEORGE LOCKHART,

MERCHANT, GLASGOW.

MAUCHLINE, 18th July, 1788.

MY DEAR SIR,

I am just going for Nithsdale, else I would certainly have transcribed some of my rhyming things for you. The Miss Baillies I have seen in Edinburgh.[1] "Fair and lovely are thy works, Lord God Almighty! Who would not praise thee for these thy gifts in thy goodness to the sons of men!" It needed not your fine taste to admire them. I declare, one day I had the honour of dining at Mr. Baillie's, I was almost in the predicament of the children of Israel, when they could not look on Moses' face for the glory that shone in it when he descended from Mount Horeb.

I did once write a poetic address from the Falls of Bruar to his grace of Athole, when I was in the Highlands. When you return to Scotland, let me know, and I will send such of my pieces as please myself best. I return to Mauchline in about ten days.

My compliments to Mr. Purden. I am in truth, but at present in haste,

Yours sincerely,

R. B.

TO MR. ALEXANDER CUNNINGHAM,

WRITER, ST. JAMES' SQUARE, EDINBURGH.

ELLISLAND, NITHSDALE, July 27th, 1788.

MY GODLIKE FRIEND,

Nay, do not stare,
You think the phrase is odd-like;
But "God is Love" the saints declare,
Then surely thou art god-like. &c.

[See verses, vol. ii. p. 254.]

My spur-galled, spavined Pegasus makes so hobbling a progress over the course of Extem-

[1] See the song on Miss Lesley Baillie, and the note.

pore, that I must here alight and try the foot-path of plain prose. I have not met with anything this long while, my dear Sir, that has given my inward man such a fillip as your kind epistle.

For my own biographical story, I can only say with the venerable Hebrew patriarch, "Here am I with the children God has given me!"[1] I have been a farmer since Whitsunday, and am just now building a house—not a Palace to attract the train-attended steps of pride-swollen Greatness, but a plain, simple domicile for Humility and Contentment. I am, too, a married man. This was a step of which I had no idea when you and I were together. On my return to Ayrshire, I found a much-loved female's positive happiness or absolute misery among my hands, and I could not trifle with such a sacred deposit. I am, since, doubly pleased with my conduct. I have the consciousness of acting up to that generosity of principle which I would be thought to possess, and I am really more and more pleased with my choice. When I tell you that Mrs. Burns was once "my Jean," you will know the rest. Of four children she bore me in seventeen months, my eldest boy is only living. By the bye, I intend breeding him up for the Church; and from an innate dexterity in secret mischief which he possesses, and a certain hypocritical gravity as he looks on the consequences, I have no small hopes of him in the sacerdotal line.

Mrs Burns does not come from Ayrshire till my said new house be ready, so I am eight or ten days at Mauchline and this place alternately. Hitherto my direction was only "at Mauchline," but "at Ellisland near Dumfries," will now likewise find me, though I prefer the former. I need not tell you that I shall expect to hear from you soon. Adieu!

R. B.

Lowe's poem[2] I shall transcribe in my first leisure hour.

[1] This is a rather misleading quotation. Of the four children born by Jean only one (Robert) was now alive, as we learn from this same letter, and he was not brought to Ellisland till August, 1789. Burns's other c[illegible]ld, the "sonsie, dear-bought Bess," continued [illegible]sgiel till her womanhood.

[2] Probably the well-known poem called "Mary's Dream" by the Rev. John Lowe, written about 1772.

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

MAUCHLINE, August 2d, 1788.

HONOURED MADAM,

Your kind letter welcomed me, yesternight, to Ayrshire. I am, indeed, seriously angry with you at the quantum of your luckpenny; but, vexed and hurt as I was, I could not help laughing very heartily at the noble lord's apology for the missed napkin.

I would write you from Nithsdale, and give you my direction there, but I have scarce an opportunity of calling at a post-office once in a fortnight. I am six miles from Dumfries, am scarcely ever in it myself, and, as yet, have little acquaintance in the neighbourhood. Besides, I am now very busy on my farm, building a dwelling-house; as at present I am almost an evangelical man in Nithsdale, for I have scarce "where to lay my head."

There are some passages in your last that brought tears in my eyes. "The heart knoweth its own sorrows, and a stranger intermeddleth not therewith." The repository of these "sorrows of the heart" is a kind of *sanctum sanctorum:* and 'tis only a chosen friend, and that, too, at particular, sacred times, who dares enter into them:—

> Heaven oft tears the bosom-chords
> That nature finest strung.

You will excuse this quotation for the sake of the author. Instead of entering on this subject farther, I shall transcribe you a few lines I wrote in a hermitage, belonging to a gentleman in my Nithsdale neighbourhood. They are almost the only favours the muses have conferred on me in that country:—

> Thou whom chance may hither lead, &c.[3]

Since I am in the way of transcribing, the following were the production of yesterday as I jogged through the wild hills of New Cumnock. I intend inserting them, or something like them, in an epistle I am going to write to the gentleman on whose friendship my Excise hopes depend, Mr. Graham of Fintry, one of the worthiest and most accomplished gentlemen, not only of this country, but, I will dare to say it, of this age. The following are just the first crude thoughts "unhousel'd, unanointed, unanel'd:—"

[3] See p. 13, vol. iii.

Pity the tuneful Muses' helpless train,
Weak, timid landsmen on life's stormy main!
The world were blest, did bliss on them depend;
Ah, that "the friendly e'er should want a friend!"
The little fate bestows they share as soon;
Unlike sage, proverb'd wisdom's hard-wrung boon.
Let Prudence number o'er each sturdy son,
Who life and wisdom at one race begun;
Who feel by reason and who give by rule;
(Instinct's a brute and sentiment a fool!)
Who make poor *will do* wait upon *I should;*
We own they're prudent, but who owns they're good?

Ye wise ones, hence! ye hurt the social eye;
God's image rudely etch'd on base alloy!
But come . . .[1]

Here the muse left me. I am astonished at what you tell me of Anthony's writing me. I never received it. Poor fellow! you vex me much by telling me that he is unfortunate. I shall be in Ayrshire ten days from this date. I have just room for an old Roman farewell.

R. B.

TO MR. ROBERT M'INDOE,

MERCHANT, GLASGOW.

MAUCHLINE, 5th August, 1788.

MY DEAR SIR,

I am vexed for nothing more, that I have not been at Glasgow, than not meeting with you. I have seldom found my friend Andrew M'Culloch wrong in his ideas of mankind; but respecting your worship he was as true as Holy Writ. This is the night of our Fair, and I as you see cannot keep well *in a line;*[2] but if you will send me by the bearer, John Ronald, carrier between Glasgow and Mauchline, fifteen yards of black silk, the same kind as that of which I bought a gown and petticoat of you formerly—lutestring, I think is its name—I will send you the money and a more coherent letter when he goes again to your good town. To be brief, send me fifteen yds. black lutestring silk, such as they used to make gowns and petticoats of, and I shall choose some sober morning before breakfast, and write you a sober answer, with the sober sum which will then be due from, dear Sir, fu' or fasting, yours sincerely,

R. B.

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

ELLISLAND, 16th August, 1788.

I am in a fine disposition, my honoured friend, to send you an elegiac epistle; and want only genius to make it quite Shenstonian:—

Why droops my heart with fancied woes forlorn?
Why sinks my soul beneath each wintry sky?

My increasing cares in this, as yet, strange country—gloomy conjectures in the dark vista of futurity—consciousness of my own inability for the struggle of the world—my broadened mark to misfortune in a wife and children;—I could indulge these reflections, till my humour should ferment into the most acid chagrin, that would corrode the very thread of life.

To counterwork these baneful feelings, I have sat down to write to you; as I declare upon my soul I always find that the most sovereign balm for my wounded spirit.

I was yesterday at Mr. Miller's to dinner for the first time. My reception was quite to my mind; from the lady of the house quite flattering. She sometimes hits on a couplet or two, *impromptu.* She repeated one or two to the admiration of all present. My suffrage as a professional man was expected: I for once went agonizing over the belly of my conscience. Pardon me, ye, my adored household gods, independence of spirit, and integrity of soul! In the course of conversation *Johnson's Musical Museum,* a collection of Scottish songs with the music, was talked of. We got a song on the harpsichord, beginning,

Raving winds around her blowing.[3]

The air was much admired: the lady of the house asked me whose were the words. "Mine, Madam—they are indeed my very best verses:" she took not the smallest notice of them! The

[1] See the whole of this first epistle to Graham of Fintry.

[2] Besides the festivities of a Mauchline Fair-night the apparent excitement of the writer had another excuse. We quote from the kirk session records the following entry:—

"Aug. 5, 1788. Sess. con.:—Compeared Robert Burns, with Jean Armour, his alleged spouse. They both acknowledged their irregular marriage, and their sorrow for that irregularity, and desiring that the Session will take such steps as may seem to them proper, in order to the Solemn Confirmation of the same marriage," &c. See vol. i. p. 83.

[3] See page 244, vol. ii.

old Scottish proverb says well, "King's caff is better than ither folks' corn." I was going to make a New Testament quotation about "casting pearls," but that would be too virulent, for the lady is actually a woman of sense and taste.

After all that has been said on the other side of the question, man is by no means a happy creature. I do not speak of the selected few, favoured by partial heaven, whose souls are tuned to gladness amid riches and honours, and prudence and wisdom. I speak of the neglected many, whose nerves, whose sinews, whose days are sold to the minions of fortune.

If I thought you had never seen it, I would transcribe for you a stanza of an old Scottish ballad, called "The Life and Age of Man;" beginning thus:

'Twas in the sixteen hunder year
Of God and fifty-three
Frae Christ was born, that bought us dear
As writings testifie.

I had an old grand-uncle with whom my mother lived a while in her girlish years: the good old man, for such he was, was long blind ere he died, during which time his highest enjoyment was to sit down and cry, while my mother would sing the simple old song of "The Life and Age of Man."[1]

It is this way of thinking; it is these melancholy truths, that make religion so precious to the poor, miserable children of men. If it is a mere phantom, existing only in the heated imagination of enthusiasm,

What truth on earth so precious as the lie?

My idle reasonings sometimes make me a little sceptical, but the necessities of my heart always give the cold philosophisings the lie. Who looks for the heart weaned from earth; the soul affianced to her God; the correspondence fixed with heaven; the pious supplication and devout thanksgiving, constant as the vicissitudes of even and morn; who thinks to meet with these in the court, the palace, in the glare of public life? No; to find them in their precious importance and divine efficacy, we must search among the obscure recesses of disappointment, affliction, poverty, and distress.

[1] See the note to the poem "Man was made to Mourn," vol. i. p. 230.

I am sure, dear Madam, you are now more than pleased with the length of my letters. I return to Ayrshire middle of next week: and it quickens my pace to think that there will be a letter from you waiting me there. I must be here again very soon for my harvest.

R. B.

TO MR. ROBERT AINSLIE, WRITER.

CARE OF MR. AINSLIE, BOOKSELLER, NEW TOWN, EDINBURGH.

MAUCHLINE, 23rd August, 1788.

I received your last, my dear friend, but I write you just now on a vexatious business.

I don't know if I ever told you some very bad reports that Mrs. M'—se once told me of Mr. Nicol. I had mentioned the affair to Mr. Cruickshank in the course of our conversation about our common friend, that a lady had said so and so, which I suspected had originated from some malevolence of Dr. Adam's.[2] He had mentioned this story to Mr. Nicol cursorily, and there it rested; till now, a prosecution has commenced between Dr. A. and Mr. N., and Mr. N. has pressed me over and over to give up the lady's name. I have refused this; and last post Mr. N. acquaints me, but in very good-natured terms, that if I persist in my refusal, I am to be served with a summons to compear and declare the fact.

Heaven knows how I should proceed! I have this moment wrote Mrs. M'—se, telling her that I have informed you of the affair; and I shall write Mr. Nicol by Tuesday's post that I will not give up my female friend till farther consideration; but that I have acquainted you with the business and the name; and that I have desired you to wait on him, which I entreat, my dear Sir, you will do; and give

[2] Dr. Adam was rector of the Edinburgh High School, in which Nicol and Cruickshank were teachers. About a year previously a quarrel between Adam and Nicol broke out. The former, an amiable man as well as an excellent scholar and teacher, having offended Nicol, a cruel disciplinarian, "in the course of his duty as superintendent of the younger classes of the school, the latter had made a personal assault upon him in the courtyard before the boys; nor could any of Adam's mild remonstrances draw forth an apology for the act." Whether this incident or some one more flagrant and characteristic of the coarse nature of Nicol is what is above alluded to we are unable to say.

him up the name or not, as your and Mrs. M'—sc's prudence shall suggest.

I am vexed to the heart that Mr. Ainslie has disappointed my brother.[1] I grasp at your kind offer, and wish you to enquire for a place among the saddlers' shops. If I get him into a first-rate shop, I will bind him a year or two, I almost do not care on what terms. He is about eighteen; really very clever; and in what work he has seen, not a despicable tradesman; but I will have him a first-rate hand if possible.

Why trouble yourself about Hamilton? Let me pay the expense, for I do not know where he is now to be found.[2] Dr. Blacklock—where he lodged, which caused me to meet with him—and Signior Dasti, junr., one of his greatest cronies, are the only intelligencers to whom I can refer you. Adieu! I am ever most cordially yours,

R. B.

TO MR. BEUGO, ENGRAVER,

EDINBURGH.

ELLISLAND, 9th Sept., 1788.

MY DEAR SIR,

There is not in Edinburgh above the number of the Graces whose letters would have given me so much pleasure as yours of the 3rd instant, which only reached me yesternight.

I am here on my farm, busy with my harvest; but for all that most pleasurable part of life called SOCIAL COMMUNICATION, I am here at the very elbow of existence. The only things that are to be found in this country, in any degree of perfection, are stupidity and canting. Prose they only know in graces, prayers, &c., and the value of these they estimate, as they do their plaiding webs—by the ell! As for the Muses, they have as much an idea of a rhinoceros as of a poet. For my old capricious but good-natured hussy of a Muse—

> By banks of Nith I sat and wept
> When Coila I thought on,
> In midst thereof I hung my harp
> The willow trees upon.

I am generally about half my time in Ayrshire with my "darling Jean," and then I, at lucid intervals, throw my horny fist across my be-cobwebbed lyre, much in the same manner as an old wife throws her hand across the spokes of her spinning wheel.

I will send you the "Fortunate Shepherdess" as soon as I return to Ayrshire, for there I keep it with other precious treasure. I shall send it by a careful hand, as I would not for anything it should be mislaid or lost. I do not wish to serve you from any benevolence, or other grave Christian virtue; 'tis purely a selfish gratification of my own feeling whenever I think of you.

You do not tell me if you are going to be married. Depend upon it if you do not make some foolish choice, it will be a very great improvement upon the dish of life. I can speak from experience, though, God knows my choice was as random as blind man's buff. . . .

If your better functions would give you leisure to write me, I should be extremely happy; that is to say, if you neither keep nor look for a regular correspondence. I hate the idea of being obliged to write a letter. I sometimes write a friend twice a week, at other times once a quarter.

I am exceedingly pleased with your fancy in making the author you mention place a map of Iceland instead of his portrait before his works: 'twas a glorious idea.[3]

Could you conveniently do me one thing?—Whenever you finish any head, I should like to have a proof copy of it. I might tell you a long story about your fine genius; but, as what every body knows cannot have escaped you, I shall not say one syllable about it.

If you see Mr. Nasmyth,[4] remember me to him most respectfully, as he both loves and deserves respect; though if he would pay less respect to the mere carcase of greatness, I should think him much nearer perfection.

R. B.

[1] William Burns, who had already served part of his apprenticeship as a saddler. We will hear more of him in the course of the correspondence.

[2] This appears to refer to the subject mentioned in letter to Anslie of June 30th.

[3] This joke was at the expense of Creech, the poet's Edinburgh publisher, who was then about to issue his own *Fugitive Pieces*.

[4] Mr. Nasmyth painted a portrait of Burns, which was engraved by Beugo as a frontispiece to the Edinburgh edition of the poems published in 1787.

TO ROBERT GRAHAM, ESQ.,

OF FINTRY.

ENCLOSING A POETICAL EPISTLE.

ELLISLAND, 10th September, 1788.

SIR,

The scrapes and premunires into which our indiscretions and follies, in the ordinary constitution of things, often bring us, are bad enough; but it is peculiarly hard that a man's virtues should involve him in disquiet, and the very goodness of his heart cause the persecution of his peace. You, Sir, have patronized and befriended me—not by barren compliments, which merely fed my vanity, or by little marks of notice, which perhaps only encumbered me more in the awkwardness of my native rusticity; but by being my persevering friend in real life; and now, as if your continued benevolence had given me a prescriptive right, I am going again to trouble you with my importunities.

Your Honourable Board sometime ago gave me my Excise commission, which I regard as my sheet-anchor in life. My farm, now that I have tried it a little, though I think it will in time be a saving bargain, yet it does by no means promise to be such a penny-worth as I was taught to expect. It is in the last stage of worn-out poverty, and it will take some time before it pays the rent. I might have had cash to supply the deficiencies of these hungry years; but I have a younger brother and three sisters on a farm in Ayrshire, and it took all my surplus over what I thought necessary for my farming capital, to save not only the comfort, but the very existence of that fireside family circle from impending destruction. This was done before I took the farm; and rather than abstract my money from my brother—a circumstance which would ruin him—I will resign the farm, and enter immediately into the service of your Honours. But I am embarked now in the farm; I have commenced married man; and I am determined to stand by the lease till resistless necessity compels me to quit the ground.

There is one way by which I may be enabled to extricate myself from this embarrassment—a scheme which I hope and am certain it is in your power to effectuate. I live here, Sir, in the very centre of a country Excise division; the present officer lately lived on a farm which he rented, in my nearest neighbourhood; and as the gentleman, owing to some legacies, is quite opulent, a removal could do him no manner of injury; and on a month's warning to give me a little time to look again over my instructions, I would not be afraid to enter on business. I do not know the name of his division, as I have not yet got acquainted with any of the Dumfries Excise people; but his own name is Leonard Smith. It would suit me to enter on it beginning of next summer, but I shall be in Edinburgh to wait upon you about the affair sometime in the ensuing winter.

When I think how and on what I have written to you, Sir, I shudder at my own *hardiesse*. Forgive me, Sir, I have told you my situation. If asking anything less could possibly have done, I would not have asked so much.

If I were in the service, it would likewise favour my poetical schemes. I am thinking of something in the rural way of the drama kind. Originality of character is, I think, the most striking beauty in that species of composition, and my wanderings in the way of my business would be vastly favourable to my picking up original traits of human nature.

I again, Sir, earnestly beg your forgiveness for this letter. I have done violence to my own feelings in writing it.

> If I in aught have done amiss,
> Impute it not!

My thoughts on this business, as usual with me when my mind is burdened, vented themselves in the enclosed verses,[1] which I have taken the liberty to inscribe to you.

You, Sir, have the power to bless; but the only claim I have to your friendly offices is my having already been the object of your goodness, which [indeed looks like] producing my debt instead of my discharge.

I am sure I go on Scripture grounds in this affair, for I "ask in faith, nothing doubting;" and for the true Scripture reason too, because

[1] See Epistle to Graham of Fintry, beginning:—

> When Nature her great master-piece design'd

vol. ii. p. 255.

I have the fullest conviction that "my benefactor is good."

I have the honour to be, Sir, your deeply indebted humble servant,

R. B.

TO MRS. ROBERT BURNS,

MAUCHLINE.

ELLISLAND, Friday, 12th Sept. 1788.

MY DEAR LOVE,

I received your kind letter with a pleasure which no letter but one from you could have given me. I dreamed of you the whole night last; but alas! I fear it will be three weeks yet ere I can hope for the happiness of seeing you. My harvest is going on. I have some to cut down still, but I put in two stacks today, so I am as tired as a dog.

[You mig]ht get one of Gilbert's sweet-milk cheeses . . . and send it to . . . On second thoughts I believe you had best get the half of Gilbert's web of table linen and make it up; though I think it damnable dear, but it is no outlaid money to us, you know. I have just now consulted my old landlady, and she thinks I may have the best for two shillings per yard; so after all, let it alone till I return; and some day next week I will be in Dumfries, and will ask the price there. I expect your new gowns will be very forward, or ready to make, against I be home to get the baiveridge.[1] I have written my long-thought-on letter to Mr. Graham, the Commissioner of Excise; and have sent a sheetful of Poetry besides. Now I talk of poetry I have [a fine] strathspey among my hands to make [a song] to, for Johnson's collection, which I . . .[2]

[1] *Baiveridge*, or more correctly *beverage*, means here the kiss which was usually given to a person of the opposite sex by one who first donned a new dress. "One is said to *gie the beverage*, or to *get the beverage;* as, 'she gat the *beverage* o' his braw new coat.'"—DR. JAMIESON.

[2] The MS. of this letter is in a tattered condition, and the latter part of it torn away. It was first published among the poet's letters by Dr. Hately Waddell, the original being in the possession of Andrew Nicolson, shoemaker, Dumfries.

TO MISS CHALMERS,[3]

EDINBURGH.

ELLISLAND, near DUMFRIES.
Sept. 16th, 1788.

Where are you? and how are you? and is Lady Mackenzie recovering her health? for I have had but one solitary letter from you. I will not think you have forgot me, Madam; and, for my part—

When thee, Jerusalem, I forget,
Skill part from my right hand!

"My heart is not of that rock, nor my soul careless as that sea." I do not make my progress among mankind as a bowl does among its fellows—rolling through the crowd without bearing away any mark or impression, except where they hit in hostile collision.

I am here, driven in with my harvest folks by bad weather; and as you and your sister once did me the honour of interesting yourselves much *à l'égard de moi*, I sit down to beg the continuation of your goodness. I can truly say that, all the exterior of life apart, I never saw two whose esteem flattered the nobler feelings of my soul—I will not say more, but so much, as Lady Mackenzie and Miss Chalmers. When I think of you—hearts the best, minds the noblest of human kind—unfortunate, even in the shades of life—when I think I have met with you, and have lived more of real life with you in eight days than I can do with almost anybody I meet with in eight years—when I think on the improbability of meeting you in this world again—I could sit down and cry like a child! If ever you honour me with a place in your esteem, I trust I can now plead more desert. I am secure against that crushing grip of iron poverty, which, alas! is less or more fatal to the native worth and purity of, I fear, the noblest souls; and a late important step in my life has kindly taken me out of the way of these ungrateful iniquities, which, however overlooked in fashionable licence, or varnished in fashionable phrase, are indeed but lighter and deeper shades of VILLANY.

[3] This, so far as is known, is the last of the poet's letters to Miss Chalmers. In less than three months she was married to Mr. Lewis Hay, banker, Edinburgh.

Shortly after my last return to Ayrshire, I married "my Jean." This was not in consequence of the attachment of romance, perhaps; but I had a long and much loved fellow-creature's happiness or misery in my determination, and I durst not trifle with so important a deposit. Nor have I any cause to repent it. If I have not got polite tattle, modish manners, and fashionable dress, I am not sickened and disgusted with the multiform curse of boarding-school affectation: and I have got the handsomest figure, the sweetest temper, the soundest constitution, and the kindest heart in the country. Mrs. Burns believes, as firmly as her creed, that I am *le plus bel esprit, et le plus honnête homme* in the universe; although she scarcely ever in her life, except the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament, and the Psalms of David in metre, spent five minutes together on either prose or verse. I must except, also, from this last a certain late publication of Scots poems, which she has perused very devoutly; and all the ballads in the country, as she has (O the partial lover! you will cry) the finest "wood note wild" I ever heard. I am the more particular in this lady's character, as I know she will henceforth have the honour of a share of your best wishes. She is still at Mauchline, as I am building my house; for this hovel that I shelter in, while occasionally here, is pervious to every blast that blows, and every shower that falls; and I am only preserved from being chilled to death by being suffocated with smoke. I do not find my farm that pennyworth I was taught to expect, but I believe in time, it may be a saving bargain. You will be pleased to hear that I have laid aside idle *éclat*, and bind every day after my reapers.

To save me from that horrid situation of at any time going down, in a losing bargain of a farm, to misery, I have taken my Excise instructions, and have my commission in my pocket for any emergency of fortune. If I could set all before your view, whatever disrespect you, in common with the world, have for this business, I know you would approve of my idea.

I will make no apology, dear Madam, for this egotistic detail; I know you and your sister will be interested in every circumstance of it. What signify the silly, idle gewgaws of wealth, or the ideal trumpery of greatness! When fellow-partakers of the same nature fear the same God, have the same benevolence of heart, the same nobleness of soul, the same detestation of every thing dishonest, and the same scorn at every thing unworthy—if they are not in the dependence of absolute beggary, in the name of common sense are they not EQUALS? And if the bias, the instinctive bias of their souls run the same way, why may they not be FRIENDS?

When I may have an opportunity of sending you this, Heaven only knows. Shenstone says, "When one is confined idle within doors by bad weather, the best antidote against *ennui* is to read the letters of, or write to, one's friends;" in that case then, if the weather continues thus, I may scrawl you half a quire.

I very lately—to wit, since harvest began—wrote a poem, not in imitation, but in the manner of Pope's Moral Epistles.[1] It is only a short essay, just to try the strength of my Muse's pinion in that way. I will send you a copy of it, when once I have heard from you. I have likewise been laying the foundation of some pretty large poetic works; how the superstructure will come on, I leave to that great maker and marrer of projects—TIME. Johnson's collection of Scots songs is going on in the third volume; and, of consequence, finds me a consumpt for a great deal of idle metre. One of the most tolerable things I have done in that way is two stanzas I made to an air a musical gentleman[2] of my acquaintance composed for the anniversary of his wedding-day, which happens on the seventh of November. Take it as follows:—

> The day returns—my bosom burns—
> The blissful day we twa did meet, &c.[3]

I shall give over this letter for shame. If I should be seized with a scribbling fit, before this goes away, I shall make it another letter; and then you may allow your patience a week's respite between the two. I have not

[1] The "Epistle to Graham of Fintry" alluded to in a preceding page.

[2] Robert Riddell of Glenriddell, a very amateurish musician indeed, but bold enough to let some of his compositions see the light in Johnson's *Museum* and elsewhere.

[3] See vol. ii. p. 259.

room for more than the old, kind, hearty FAREWELL![1]

To make some amends, *mes chères Mesdames*, for dragging you on to this second sheet; and to relieve a little the tiresomeness of my unstudied and uncorrectible prose, I shall transcribe you some of my late poetic bagatelles; though I have, these eight or ten months, done very little that way. One day, in a hermitage on the banks of Nith, belonging to a gentleman in my neighbourhood, who is so good as give me a key at pleasure, I wrote as follows; supposing myself the sequestered, venerable inhabitant of the lonely mansion.

LINES WRITTEN IN FRIARS' CARSE HERMITAGE.

Thou whom chance may hither lead,
Be thou clad in russet weed, &c.[1]

R. B.

TO MR. MORISON,

MAUCHLINE.[2]

ELLISLAND, September 22d, 1788.

MY DEAR SIR,

Necessity obliges me to go into my new house even before it be plastered. I will inhabit the one end until the other is finished. About three weeks more, I think, will at farthest be my time, beyond which I cannot stay in this present house. If ever you wish to deserve the blessing of him that was ready to perish; if ever you were in a situation that a little kindness would have rescued you from many evils; if ever you hope to find rest in future states of untried being—get these matters of mine ready. My servant will be out in the beginning of next week for the clock. My compliments to Mrs. Morison.

I am, after all my tribulation,
Dear Sir, yours,—R. B.

[1] See vol. iii. p. 13.

[2] Morison was a cabinet-maker in Mauchline, and the letter refers to some household furniture which the poet had ordered. He was now preparing to remove into his new house at Ellisland, having hitherto been living at a place called The Isle, about a mile distant from it.

TO ROBERT GRAHAM, ESQ.,

OF FINTRY.

ELLISLAND, 23d Sept. 1788.

SIR,

Though I am scarce able to hold up my head with this fashionable influenza, which is just now the rage hereabouts, yet with half a spark of life, I would thank you for your most generous favour of the 14th, which, owing to my infrequent calls at the post-office in the hurry of harvest, came only to hand yesternight. I assure you, my ever-honoured Sir, I read it with eyes brimful of other drops than those of anguish. Oh, what means of happiness the Author of goodness has put into their hands to whom he has given the power to bless! —and what real happiness has he given to those on whom he has likewise bestowed kind, generous, benevolent dispositions! Did you know, Sir, from how many fears and forebodings the friendly assurance of your patronage and protection has freed me, it would be some reward for your goodness.

I am cursed with a melancholy prescience, which makes me the veriest coward in life. There is not any exertion which I would not attempt, rather than be in that horrid situation —to be ready to call on the mountains to fall on me, and the hills to cover me from the presence of a haughty landlord, or his still more haughty underling, to whom I owed—what I could not pay. My muse, too, the circumstance that after my domestic comfort, is by far the dearest to my soul, to have it in my power to cultivate her acquaintance to advantage—in short, Sir, you have, like the great Being whose image you so richly bear, made a creature happy, who had no other claim to your goodness than his necessity, and who can make you no other return than his grateful acknowledgment.

My farm, I think I am certain, will in the long-run be an object for me; and as I rent it for the first three years something under . . . , I will be able to weather by a twelvemonth, or perhaps more; though it would make me set fortune more at defiance if it can be in your power to grant my request, as I mentioned, in the beginning of next summer. I was thinking that, as I am only a little more than five miles from Dumfries, I might perhaps officiate there, if any of these officers could be

removed with more propriety than Mr. Smith; but besides the monstrous inconvenience of it to me, I could not bear to injure a poor fellow by ousting him to make way for myself; to a wealthy son of good-fortune like Smith, the injury is imaginary where the propriety of your rules admits.

Had I been well, I intended to have troubled you further with a description of my soil and plan of farming; but business will call me to town about February next. I hope then to have the honour of assuring you in *propriâ personâ*, how much and how truly I am, Sir, your deeply indebted and ever-grateful humble servant, R. B.

TO MRS. DUNLOP, OF DUNLOP.

MOREHAM MAINS, HADDINGTON.

MAUCHLINE, 27th Sept. 1788.

I have received twins, dear Madam, more than once; but scarcely ever with more pleasure than when I received yours of the 12th instant. To make myself understood; I had wrote to Mr. Graham, inclosing my poem addressed to him, and the same post which favoured me with yours brought me an answer from him. It was dated the very day he had received mine; and I am quite at a loss to say whether it was most polite or kind.

Your criticisms, my honoured benefactress, are truly the work of a friend. They are not the blasting depredations of a canker-toothed, caterpillar critic; nor are they the fair statement of cold impartiality, balancing with unfeeling exactitude the *pro* and *con* of an author's merits; they are the judicious observations of animated friendship, selecting the beauties of the piece. I am just arrived from Nithsdale, and will be here a fortnight. I was on horseback this morning by three o'clock; for between my wife and my farm is just forty-six miles. As I jogged on in the dark, I was taken with a poetic fit, as follows:

MRS. FERGUSON OF CRAIGDARROCH'S LAMENTATION FOR THE DEATH OF HER SON;

an uncommonly promising youth of eighteen or nineteen years of age.

"Fate gave the word, the arrow sped,
And pierc'd my darling's heart."

[Vol. ii. p. 259.]

You will not send me your poetic rambles, but, you see, I am no niggard of mine. I am sure your impromptus give me double pleasure; what falls from your pen can neither be unentertaining in itself, nor indifferent to me.

The one fault you found is just; but I cannot please myself in an emendation.

What a life of solicitude is the life of a parent! You interested me much in your young couple. I suppose it is not any of the ladies I have seen.

I would not take my folio paper for this epistle, and now I repent it. I am so jaded with my dirty long journey that I was afraid to drawl into the essence of dulness with any thing larger than a quarto, and so I must leave out another rhyme of this morning's manufacture.

I will pay the sapientipotent George most cheerfully, to hear from you ere I leave Ayrshire. I have the honour to be, dear Madam, your much obliged, and most respectful humble servant, R. B.

TO MR. PETER HILL.

MAUCHLINE, 1st October, 1788.

I have been here in this country about three days, and all that time my chief reading has been the "Address to Loch Lomond" you were so obliging as to send to me.[1] Were I impannelled one of the author's jury, to determine his criminality respecting the sin of poesy, my verdict should be "guilty! A poet of nature's making!" It is an excellent method for improvement, and what I believe every poet does, to place some favourite classic author in his own walks of study and composition, before him, as a model. Though your author had not mentioned the name, I could have, at half a glance, guessed his model to be Thomson. Will my brother-poet forgive me, if I venture to hint that his imitation of that immortal bard is in two or three places rather more servile than such a genius as his required:—*e.g.*

To soothe the maddening passions all to peace.
—ADDRESS.

[1] A poem written by the Rev. James Cririe, D.D., afterwards minister of Dalton, Dumfries-shire; died 1835. It was published by the poet's correspondent.

To soothe the throbbing passions into peace.
—THOMSON.

I think the "Address" is in simplicity, harmony, and elegance of versification, fully equal to the "Seasons." Like Thomson, too, he has looked into nature for himself: you meet with no copied description. One particular criticism I made at first reading; in no one instance has he said too much. He never flags in his progress, but, like a true poet of nature's making, kindles in his course. His beginning is simple and modest, as if distrustful of the strength of his pinion; only, I do not altogether like—

Truth,
The soul of every song that's nobly great.

Fiction is the soul of many a song that is nobly great. Perhaps I am wrong: this may be but a prose criticism. Is not the phrase, in line 7, page 6, "Great Lake," too much vulgarized by every-day language for so sublime a poem?

Great mass of waters, theme for nobler song,

is perhaps no emendation. His enumeration of a comparison with other lakes is at once harmonious and poetic. Every reader's ideas must sweep the

Winding margin of an hundred miles.

The perspective that follows mountains blue—the imprisoned billows beating in vain—the wooded isles—the digression on the yew-tree—"Benlomond's lofty, cloud-envelop'd head," &c. are beautiful. A thunder-storm is a subject which has been often tried, yet our poet in his grand picture has interjected a circumstance, so far as I know, entirely original:—

The gloom
Deep seam'd with frequent streaks of moving fire.

In his preface to the Storm, "the glens how dark between," is noble Highland landscape! The "rain ploughing the red mould," too, is beautifully fancied. "Benlomond's lofty, pathless top," is a good expression; and the surrounding view from it is truly great: the

silver mist,
Beneath the beaming sun,

is well described; and here he has contrived to enliven his poem with a little of that passion which bids fair, I think, to usurp the modern muses altogether. I know not how far this episode is a beauty upon the whole, but the swain's wish to carry "some faint idea of the vision bright," to entertain her "partial listening ear," is a pretty thought. But, in my opinion, the most beautiful passages in the whole poem are the fowls crowding, in wintry frosts, to Lochlomond's "hospitable flood;" their wheeling round, their lighting, mixing, diving, &c.; and the glorious description of the sportsman. This last is equal to any thing in the "Seasons." The idea of "the floating tribes distant seen, far glistering to the moon," provoking his eye as he is obliged to leave them, is a noble ray of poetic genius. "The howling winds," the "hideous roar" of "the white cascades," are all in the same style.

I forget that while I am thus holding forth with the heedless warmth of an enthusiast, I am perhaps tiring you with nonsense. I must, however, mention that the last verse of the sixteenth page is one of the most elegant compliments I have ever seen. I must likewise notice that beautiful paragraph beginning "The gleaming lake," &c. I dare not go into the particular beauties of the last two paragraphs, but they are admirably fine, and truly Ossianic.

I must beg your pardon for this lengthened scrawl. I had no idea of it when I began.—I should like to know who the author is; but, whoever he be, please present him with my grateful thanks for the entertainment he has afforded me.

A friend of mine desired me to commission for him two books, *Letters on the Religion essential to Man*, a book you sent me before; and *The World Unmasked, or the Philosopher the greatest Cheat*. Send me them by the first opportunity. The Bible you sent me is truly elegant; I only wish it had been in two volumes.

R. B.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE STAR."[1]

November 8th, 1788.

SIR,

Notwithstanding the opprobrious epithets with which some of our philosophers and

[1] The editor of the London *Star* at this time was Mr. Peter Stuart, to whose paper Burns sent several of his

gloomy sectarians have branded our nature—the principle of universal selfishness, the proneness to all evil, they have given us; still, the detestation in which inhumanity to the distressed, or insolence to the fallen, are held by all mankind, shows that they are not natives of the human heart. Even the unhappy partner of our kind who is undone, the bitter consequence of his follies or his crimes, who but sympathizes with the miseries of this ruined profligate brother? We forget the injuries, and feel for the man.

I went, last Wednesday, to my parish church, most cordially to join in grateful acknowledgment to the AUTHOR OF ALL GOOD, for the consequent blessings of the glorious Revolution.[1] To that auspicious event we owe no less than our liberties, civil and religious: to it we are likewise indebted for the present Royal Family; the ruling features of whose administration have ever been mildness to the subject, and tenderness to his rights.

Bred and educated in revolution principles, the principles of reason and common sense, it could not be any silly political prejudice which made my heart revolt at the harsh, abusive manner in which the reverend gentleman mentioned the House of Stuart, and which, I am afraid, was too much the language of the day. We may rejoice sufficiently in our deliverance from past evils, without cruelly raking up the ashes of those whose misfortune it was, perhaps as much as their crime, to be the authors of those evils; and we may bless GOD for all his goodness to us as a nation, without, at the same time, cursing a few ruined, powerless exiles, who only harboured ideas, and made attempts, that most of us would have done, had we been in their situation.

"The bloody and tyrannical House of Stuart" may be said with propriety and justice, when compared with the present royal family, and the sentiments of our days; but is there no allowance to be made for the manners of the times? Were the royal contemporaries of the Stuarts more attentive to their subjects' rights? Might not the epithets of "bloody and tyrannical" be, with at least equal justice, applied to the House of Tudor, of York, or any other of their predecessors?

The simple state of the case, Sir, seems to be this:—At that period, the science of government, the knowledge of the true relation between king and subject, was, like other sciences and other knowledge, just in its infancy, emerging from dark ages of ignorance and barbarity.

The Stuarts only contended for prerogatives which they knew their predecessors enjoyed, and which they saw their contemporaries enjoying; but these prerogatives were inimical to the happiness of a nation and the rights of subjects.

In this contest between prince and people, the consequence of that light of science which had lately dawned over Europe, the monarch of France, for example, was victorious over the struggling liberties of his people: with us, luckily, the monarch failed, and his unwarrantable pretensions fell a sacrifice to our rights and happiness. Whether it was owing to the wisdom of leading individuals, or to the jostling of parties, I cannot pretend to determine; but, likewise happily for us, the kingly power was shifted into another branch of the family, who, as they owed the throne solely to the call of a free people, could claim nothing inconsistent with the covenanted terms which placed them there.

The Stuarts have been condemned and laughed at for the folly and impracticability of their attempts in 1715 and 1745. That they failed, I bless GOD; but cannot join in the ridicule against them. Who does not know that the abilities or defects of leaders and commanders are often hidden until put to the touchstone of exigency; and that there is a caprice of fortune, an omnipotence in particular accidents and conjunctures of circumstances, which exalt us as heroes, or brand us as madmen, just as they are for or against us?

Man, Mr. Publisher, is a strange, weak, inconsistent being: who would believe, Sir, that in this our Augustan age of liberality and refinement, while we seem so justly sensible

productions. See, for instance, note to the "New Psalm," vol. iii. p. 30. Mr. Stuart, it would appear, by sending the poet his paper, drew from him the lines beginning, "Kind Sir, I've read your paper through," &c.

[1] The General Assembly of the Church of Scotland had appointed Wednesday the 5th November to be observed as a "day of solemn thanksgiving for that most glorious event, the Revolution."—The parish alluded to is Dunscore, of which the Rev. Mr. Kirkpatrick was then pastor.

and jealous of our rights and liberties, and animated with such indignation against the very memory of those who would have subverted them—that a certain people under our national protection should complain, not against our monarch and a few favourite advisers, but against our WHOLE LEGISLATIVE BODY, for similar oppression, and almost in the very same terms, as our forefathers did of the House of Stuart! I will not, I cannot, enter into the merits of the cause; but I dare say the American Congress, in 1776, will be allowed to be as able and as enlightened as the English Convention was in 1688; and that their posterity will celebrate the centenary of their deliverance from us, as duly and sincerely as we do ours from the oppressive measures of the wrong-headed House of Stuart.[1]

To conclude, Sir; let every man who has a tear for the many miseries incident to humanity, feel for a family illustrious as any in Europe, and unfortunate beyond historic precedent; and let every Briton (and particularly every Scotsman), who ever looked with reverential pity on the dotage of a parent, cast a veil over the fatal mistakes of the kings of his forefathers.

R. B.

TO MRS. DUNLOP,

AT MOREHAM MAINS.

MAUCHLINE, 13th Nov. 1788.

MADAM,

I had the pleasure of dining at Dunlop yesterday. Men are said to flatter women because they are weak; if it is so, poets must be weaker still; for Misses Rachel and Keith, and Miss Georgina M'Kay, with their flattering attentions, and artful compliments, absolutely turned my head. I own they did not lard me over as many a poet does his patron, or still more his patroness, nor did they sugar me up as a Cameronian preacher does J—s C—st; but they so intoxicated me with their sly insinuations and delicate innendos of compliment, that, if it had not been for a lucky recollection, how much additional weight and lustre your good opinion and friendship must give me in that circle, I had certainly looked upon myself as a person of no small consequence. I dare not say one word how much I was charmed with the Major's friendly welcome, elegant manner, and acute remark, lest I should be thought to balance my orientalisms of applause over-against the finest quey[2] in Ayrshire, which he made me a present of to help and adorn my farm-stock. As it was on Hallow-day, I am determined annually as that day returns, to decorate her horns with an ode of gratitude to the family of Dunlop.

The songs in the second volume marked D. are Dr. Blacklock's; but, as I am sorry to say, they are far short of his other works. I, who only know the cyphers of them all, shall never let it be known. Those marked T. are the work of an obscure, tippling, but extraordinary body of the name of Tytler; a mortal who, though he drudges about Edinburgh as a common printer, with leaky shoes, a sky-lighted hat, and knee-buckles as unlike as George-by-the-grace-of-God and Solomon-the-son-of-David; yet that same unknown, drunken mortal is author and compiler of three-fourths of Elliot's pompous *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Those marked Z. I have given to the world as old verses to their respective tunes; but in fact, of a good many of them, little more than the chorus is ancient; though there is no reason for telling everybody this piece of intelligence. Next letter I write you, I shall send you one or two sets of verses I intend for Johnson's third volume.

What you mention of the Thanksgiving day is inspiration from above. Is it not remarkable, odiously remarkable, that though manners are more civilized, and the rights of mankind better understood, by an Augustan century's improvement, yet in this reign of heavenly Hanoverianism, and almost in this very year, an empire beyond the Atlantic has

[1] How true a prophet the poet here was may be gathered from the following:—

New Year's Day [1876] was ushered in with unusual festivities throughout the United States. It began the Centennial year. In all the towns and cities the mass of the population were out of doors until long after midnight on December 31st, and public meetings, devotional exercises, processions, bonfires, illuminations, salutes, the ringing of bells, and other rejoicings welcomed the new year. This celebration naturally culminated at Philadelphia, which was regarded as the "Centennial City," *par excellence.—Annual Register.*

[2] A young cow, a heifer.

its *Revolution* too, and for the very same maladministration and legislative misdemeanours in the illustrious and sapientipotent Family of H—— as was complained of in the "tyrannical and bloody house of Stuart."

So soon as I know of your arrival at Dunlop, I will take the first convenience to dedicate a day, or perhaps two, to you and friendship, under the guarantee of the Major's hospitality. There will soon be three score and ten miles of permanent distance between us; and now that your friendship and friendly correspondence is entwisted with the heart-strings of my enjoyment of life, I must indulge myself in a happy day of "The feast of reason and the flow of soul." I have the honour to be, Madam, your grateful humble servant,

R. B.

TO MR. JAMES JOHNSON, ENGRAVER.

MAUCHLINE, Nov. 15th, 1788.

MY DEAR SIR,

I have sent you two more songs. If you have got any tunes, or any thing to correct, please send them by return of the carrier.

I can easily see, my dear friend, that you will very probably have four volumes. Perhaps you may not find your account lucratively in this business; but you are a patriot for the music of your country; and I am certain posterity will look on themselves as highly indebted to your public spirit. Be not in a hurry; let us go on correctly, and your name shall be immortal.

I am preparing a flaming preface for your third volume. I see every day new musical publications advertised; but what are they? Gaudy, hunted butterflies of a day, and then vanish for ever: but your work will outlive the momentary neglects of idle fashion, and defy the teeth of time.

Have you never a fair goddess that leads you a wild-goose chase of amorous devotion? Let me know a few of her qualities, such as whether she be rather black, or fair; plump, or thin; short, or tall, &c.; and choose your air, and I shall task my muse to celebrate her.

R. B.

TO DR. BLACKLOCK.[1]

MAUCHLINE, Nov. 15th, 1788.

REVEREND AND DEAR SIR,

As I hear nothing of your motions, but that you are, or were, out of town, I do not know where this may find you, or whether it will find you at all. I wrote you a long letter, dated from the land of matrimony, in June; but either it had not found you, or, what I dread more, it found you or Mrs. Blacklock in too precarious a state of health and spirits to take notice of an idle packet.

I have done many little things for Johnson, since I had the pleasure of seeing you; and I have finished one piece, in the way of Pope's "Moral Epistles;" but, from your silence, I have every thing to fear, so I have only sent

[1] A short sketch of the life of this gentleman will be found in vol. iii. of this work in connection with a poetical epistle by Burns to him (21st Oct. 1789) written in return for an epistle in verse received from the doctor. As we give here a portrait of Dr. Blacklock we also present the reader with a specimen of his poetry, premising that the piece was intended as a tribute of affection to his wife.

ODE TO AURORA

ON MELISSA'S BIRTH-DAY.

Of Time and Nature eldest born,
Emerge, thou rosy-fingered Morn;
Emerge in purest dress arrayed,
And chase from heaven night's envious shade,
That I once more may pleased survey,
And hail Melissa's natal day.

Of Time and Nature eldest born,
Emerge, thou rosy-fingered Morn.
In order at the eastern gate
The Hours to draw thy chariot wait;
Whilst Zephyr on his balmy wings
Mild Nature's fragrant tribute brings,
With odours sweet to strew thy way,
And grace the bland revolving day.
But, as thou lead'st the radiant sphere,
That gilds its birth and marks the year,
And as his stronger glories rise,
Diffused around the expanded skies,
Till clothed with beams serenely bright,
All heaven's vast concave flames with light;

So when through life's protracted day,
Melissa still pursues her way,
Her virtues with thy splendour vie,
Increasing to the mental eye;
Though less conspicuous, not less dear,
Long may they Bion's prospect cheer;
So shall his heart no more repine,
Blessed with her rays, though robbed of thine.

K.[1]

v. 15th, 1788.

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you two melancholy things,[1] and I tremble lest they should too well suit the tone of your present feelings.

In a fortnight I move, bag and baggage, to Nithsdale; till then, my direction is at this place; after that period, it will be at Ellisland, near Dumfries. It would extremely oblige me were it but half a line, to let me know how you are, and where you are. Can I be indifferent to the fate of a man to whom I owe so much? A man whom I not only esteem, but venerate.

My warmest good wishes and most respectful compliments to Mrs. Blacklock, and Miss Johnson, if she is with you.

I cannot conclude without telling you that I am more and more pleased with the step I took respecting "my Jean." Two things, from my happy experience, I set down as apophthegms in life. A wife's head is immaterial, compared with her heart; and—"Virtue's (for wisdom what poet pretends to it?) ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace." Adieu!

R. B.

TO MR. JOHN M'MURDO, ESQ.,

DRUMLANRIG.

SANQUHAR, 26th Nov. 1788.

SIR,

I write you this and the enclosed,[2] literally *en passant*, for I am just baiting on my way to Ayrshire. I have philosophy or pride enough to support me with unwounded indifference against the neglect of my more dull superiors, the merely rank and file of noblesse and gentry—nay, even to keep my vanity quite sober under the larding of their compliments; but from those who are equally distinguished by their rank and character—those who bear the true elegant impressions of the great Creator on the richest materials—their little notices and attentions are to me amongst the first of earthly enjoyments. The honour thou didst my fugitive pieces in requesting copies of them is so highly flattering to my feelings and poetic ambition, that I could not resist even this half opportunity of scrawling off for you the enclosed as a small but honest testimony how truly and gratefully I have the honour to be, Sir, your deeply obliged humble servant,

R. B.

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

ELLISLAND, 17th Dec. 1788.

MY DEAR HONOURED FRIEND,

Yours, dated Edinburgh, which I have just read, makes me very unhappy. "Almost blind and wholly deaf," are melancholy views of human nature; but when told of a much-loved and honoured friend, they carry misery in the sound. Goodness on your part, and gratitude on mine, began a tie which has gradually entwisted itself among the dearest chords of my bosom, and I tremble at the omens of your late and present ailing habit and shattered health. You miscalculate matters widely, when you forbid my waiting on you, lest it should hurt my worldly concerns. My small scale of farming is exceedingly more simple and easy than what you have lately seen at Morcham Mains. But, be that as it may, the heart of the man and the fancy of the poet are the two grand considerations for which I live: if miry ridges and dirty dunghills are to engross the best part of the functions of my soul immortal, I had better been a rook or a magpie at once, and then I should not have been plagued with any ideas superior to breaking of clods and picking up grubs; not to mention barn-door cocks or mallards, creatures with which I could almost exchange lives at any time. If you continue so deaf, I am afraid a visit will be no great pleasure to either of us; but if I hear you are got so well again as to be able to relish conversation, look you to it, Madam, for I will make my threatenings good. I am to be at the New-year-day fair of Ayr; and, by all that is sacred in the world, friend, I *will* come and see you. . . .

Your meeting, which you so well describe, with your old schoolfellow and friend, was

[1] The "two melancholy things" were the "Mother's lament for the death of her son," and the song beginning, "The lazy mist hangs from the brow of the hill," being the two last pieces of vol. ii.

[2] It is not certain what piece was inclosed. Scott Douglas suggests the song, "O, were I on Parnassus' Hill," which he thinks may have been composed on this very journey.

truly interesting. Out upon the ways of the world!—They spoil these "social offspring of the heart." Two veterans of the "men of the world" would have met with little more heart-workings than two old hacks worn out on the road. Apropos, is not the Scotch phrase, "Auld lang syne," exceedingly expressive? There is an old song and tune which has often thrilled through my soul. You know I am an enthusiast in old Scotch songs. I shall give you the verses on the other sheet, as I suppose Mr. Ker[1] will save you the postage.

Should auld acquaintance be forgot?[2]

Light be the turf on the breast of the Heaven-inspired poet who composed this glorious fragment! There is more of the fire of native genius in it than in half a dozen modern English Bacchanalians! Now I am on my hobby-horse, I cannot help inserting two other old stanzas, which please me mightily:—

Go, fetch to me a pint o' wine, &c.[3]

R. B.

TO WILLIAM CRUICKSHANK.

ELLISLAND, [December,] 1788.

I have not room, my dear friend, to answer all the particulars of your last kind letter. I shall be in Edinburgh on some business very soon; and as I shall be two days, or perhaps three, in town, we shall discuss matters *viva voce*. My knee, I believe, will never be entirely well: and an unlucky fall this winter has made it still worse. I well remember the circumstances you allude to, respecting Creech's opinion of Mr. Nicol; but, as the first gentleman owes me still about fifty pounds, I dare not meddle in the affair.

It gave me a very heavy heart to read such accounts of the consequence of your quarrel with that puritanic, rotten-hearted, hell-commissioned scoundrel, Adam.[4] If, notwithstanding your unprecedented industry in public, and your irreproachable conduct in private life, he still has you so much in his power, what ruin may he not bring on some others I could name?

Many and happy returns of seasons to you, with your dearest and worthiest friend, and the lovely little pledge of your happy union. May the great Author of life, and of every enjoyment that can render life delightful, make her that comfortable blessing to you both, which you so ardently wish for, and which, allow me to say, you so well deserve! Glance over the foregoing verses,[5] and let me have your blots. Adieu

R. B.

TO MR. JOHN TENNANT,

AUCHENBAY.[6]

CARE OF MR. JOHN ROBB, INNKEEPER, AYR.

December 22d, 1788.

I yesterday tried my cask of whiskey for the first time, and I assure you it does you great credit. It will bear five waters, strong: or six, ordinary toddy. The whiskey of this country is a most rascally liquor; and, by consequence, only drunk by the most rascally part of the inhabitants. I am persuaded, if you once get a footing here, you might do a great deal of business, in the way of consumpt; and should you commence distiller again, this is the native barley country. I am ignorant if, in your present way of dealing, you would think it worth your while to extend your business so far as this country side. I write you this on the account of an accident, which I must take the merit of having partly designed too. A neighbour of mine, a John Currie, miller in Carsemill—a man who is, in a word, a good man, a "very" good man, even for a £500 bargain—he and his wife were in my

[1] Postmaster in Edinburgh, who was ever ready to frank a letter for a friend, or, as Chambers says, even a parcel, though it took the bulk and weight of a pair of buckskin breeches.

[2] See p. 11, vol. iii.

[3] See p. 12, vol. iii.

[4] Respecting Dr. Adam and his quarrel with Cruickshank's colleague, Nicol, see letter to Robert Ainslie, dated 23d August of this year. Burns's partisanship for his friends must have entirely blinded him to the character of Dr. Adam, who was a most amiable and excellent man.

[5] "Verses written in Friars' Carse Hermitage."

[6] John Tennant was a son of Mr. Tennant of Glenconner, "guid auld Glen." See note to the poetical letter addressed to James Tennant, vol. iii. p. 25. Auchenbay is a place in Ochiltree parish, Ayrshire, the same parish in which Glenconner is situated.

house the time I broke open the cask. They keep a country public-house, and sell a great deal of foreign spirits, but all along thought that whiskey would have degraded their house. They were perfectly astonished at my whiskey, both for its taste and strength; and, by their desire, I write you to know if you could supply them with liquor of an equal quality, and what price. Please write me by first post, and direct to me at Ellisland, near Dumfries. If you could take a jaunt this way yourself, I have a spare spoon, knife, and fork, very much at your service. My compliments to Mrs. Tennant, and all the good folks in Glenconner and Barquharric.

R. B.

TO MRS. DUNLOP.[1]

ELLISLAND,
New-year-day Morning, 1789.

This, dear Madam, is a morning of wishes, and would to God that I came under the apostle James's description!—"the effectual fervent prayer of a *righteous man* availeth much." In that case, Madam, you should welcome in a year full of blessings: everything that obstructs or disturbs tranquillity and self-enjoyment, should be removed, and every pleasure that frail Humanity can taste, should be yours. I own myself so little a Presbyterian, that I approve of set times and seasons of more than ordinary acts of devotion, for breaking in on that habituated routine of life and thought, which is so apt to reduce our existence to a kind of instinct, or even sometimes, and with some minds, to a state very little superior to mere machinery.

This day; the first Sunday of May; a breezy, blue-skyed noon some time about the beginning, and a hoary morning and calm sunny day about the end, of autumn; these, time out of mind, have been with me a kind of holidays. Not like the sacramental, executioner face of a Kilmarnock Communion; but to laugh or cry, be cheerful or pensive, moral or devout, according to the mood and tense of the season and myself. I believe I owe this to that glorious paper in the *Spectator*, "The Vision of Mirza," a piece that struck my young fancy before I was capable of fixing an idea to a word of three syllables: "On the fifth day of the moon, which, according to the custom of my forefathers, I always *keep holy*, after having washed myself, and offered up my morning devotions, I ascended the high hill of Bagdat, in order to pass the rest of the day in meditation and prayer, &c."

We know nothing, or next to nothing, of the substance or structure of our souls, so cannot account for those seeming caprices in them, that one should be particularly pleased with this thing, or struck with that, which on minds of a different cast, makes no extraordinary impression. I have some favourite flowers in spring, among which are the mountain-daisy, the hare-bell, the fox-glove, the wild brier-rose, the budding birch, and the hoary hawthorn,[2] that I view and hang over with particular delight. I never hear the loud, solitary whistle of the curlew in a summer noon, or the wild mixing cadence of a troop of grey plover in an autumnal morning, without feeling an elevation of soul like the enthusiasm of devotion or poetry. Tell me, my dear friend, to what can this be owing? Are we a piece of machinery, which, like the Æolian harp, passive, takes the impression of the passing accident? Or do these workings argue something within us above the trodden clod? I own myself partial to such proofs of those awful and important realities—a God that made all things—man's immaterial and immortal nature—and a world of weal or woe beyond death and the grave—these proofs that we deduct by dint of our own powers of observation. However respectable individuals in all ages have been, I have ever looked on Mankind in the lump to be nothing better than a foolish, headstrong, credulous, unthinking Mob; and their universal belief has ever had extremely little weight with me. Still I am a very sincere believer in the Bible; but I am drawn by the conviction of a Man, not by the halter of an Ass.

Apropos to an Ass, how do you like the

[1] The text of this letter is as given by Mr. Scott Douglas, who obtained a transcript of the poet's holograph MS. from its owner in America, Mr. Robert Clarke, Cincinnati. Currie's version of the letter (quoted in Lockhart's *Life*) shows some slight variations, and is also incomplete.

[2] See vol. i. p. 90, note.

following Apostrophe to Dulness, which I intend to interweave in "The Poet's Progress."

O Dulness, portion of the truly blest! &c.
(See vol. iii. p. 17.)

I have sketched two or three verses to you but as a private opportunity offers immediately, I must defer transcribing them. A servant of mine goes to Ayrshire with this, but I shall write you by post. If I am to be so happy as to have it in my power to see you when I go to Ayr Fair, which I very much doubt, I will try to dine at Dunlop in the Wednesday of that week.

If it is good weather in the Fair-week, I shall try my utmost; for if I hit my aims aright, it will not be in my power in any given time again: Farewell!

R. B.

TO DR. MOORE.

ELLISLAND, 4th Jan. 1789.

SIR,

As often as I think of writing to you, which has been three or four times every week these six months, it gives me something so like the idea of an ordinary-shaped statue offering at a conversation with the Rhodian colossus, that my mind misgives me, and the affair always miscarries somewhere, between purpose and resolve. I have at last got some business with you, and business letters are written by the style-book. I say my business is with you, Sir, for you never had any with me, except the business that benevolence has in the mansion of poverty.

The character and employment of a poet were formerly my pleasure, but are now my pride. I know that a very great deal of my late *éclat* was owing to the singularity of my situation, and the honest prejudice of Scotsmen: but still, as I said in the preface to my first edition, I do look upon myself as having some pretensions from Nature to the poetic character. I have not a doubt but the knack, the aptitude, to learn the muses' trade, is a gift by Him "who forms the secret bias of the soul;"—but I as firmly believe, that *excellence* in the profession is the fruit of industry, labour, attention, and pains. At least I am resolved to try my doctrine by the test of experience. Another appearance from the press I put off to a very distant day, a day that may never arrive—but poesy I am determined to prosecute with all my vigour. Nature has given very few, if any, of the profession, the talents of shining in every species of composition. I shall try (for until trial it is impossible to know) whether she has qualified me to shine in any one. The worst of it is, by the time one has finished a piece, it has been so often viewed and reviewed before the mental eye, that one loses, in a good measure, the powers of critical discrimination. Here the best criterion I know is a friend—not only of abilities to judge, but with good nature enough, like a prudent teacher with a young learner, to praise perhaps a little more than is exactly just, lest the thin-skinned animal fall into that most deplorable of all poetic diseases—heart-breaking despondency of himself. Dare I, Sir, already immensely indebted to your goodness, ask the additional obligation of your being that friend to me? I enclose you an essay of mine in a walk of poesy to me entirely new; I mean the epistle addressed to R. G., Esq., or Robert Graham of Fintry, Esq., a gentleman of uncommon worth, to whom I lie under very great obligations. The story of the poem, like most of my poems, is connected with my own story, and to give you the one, I must give you something of the other. I cannot boast of Mr. Creech's ingenuous, fair dealing to me. He kept me hanging about Edinburgh from the 7th of August, 1787, until the 13th April, 1788, before he would condescend to give me a statement of affairs; nor had I got it even then, but for an angry letter I wrote him, which irritated his pride. "I could"—not a "tale" but a detail "unfold;" but what am I that I should speak against the Lord's anointed Bailie of Edinburgh?

I believe I shall, in whole, £100 copy-right included, clear about £400 some little odds; and even part of this depends upon what the gentleman has yet to settle with me. I give you this information, because you did me the honour to interest yourself much in my welfare. I give you this information, but I give it to yourself only, for I am still much in the gentleman's mercy. Perhaps I injure the man in the idea I am sometimes tempted to have of him—God forbid I should! A little time will

try, for in a month I shall go to town to wind up the business if possible.

To give the rest of my story in brief, I have married "my Jean," and taken a farm; with the first step I have every day more and more reason to be satisfied; with the last, it is rather the reverse. I have a younger brother, who supports my aged mother, another still younger brother, and three sisters, in a farm. On my last return from Edinburgh it cost me about £180 to save them from ruin. Not that I have lost so much—I only interposed between my brother and his impending fate by the loan of so much. I give myself no airs on this, for it was mere selfishness on my part: I was conscious that the wrong scale of the balance was pretty heavily charged, and I thought that throwing a little filial piety and fraternal affection into the scale in my favour, might help to smooth matters at the *grand reckoning*. There is still one thing would make my circumstances quite easy: I have an excise officer's commission, and I live in the midst of a country division. My request to Mr. Graham, who is one of the commissioners of excise, was, if in his power, to procure me that division. If I were very sanguine, I might hope that some of my great patrons might procure me a treasury warrant for supervisor, surveyor-general, &c. . . .

Thus, secure of a livelihood, "to thee, sweet poetry, delightful maid," I would consecrate my future days.

R. B.

TO MR. ROBERT AINSLIE.

ELLISLAND, January 6th, 1789.

Many happy returns of the season to you, my dear Sir! May you be comparatively happy up to your comparative worth among the sons of men; which wish would, I am sure, make you one of the most blest of the human race.

I do not know if passing a "Writer to the Signet" be a trial of scientific merit, or a mere business of friends and interest. However it be, let me quote you my two favourite passages, which, though I have repeated them ten thousand times, still they rouse my manhood and steel my resolution like inspiration.

> On Reason build resolve,
> That column of true majesty in man.—YOUNG.

> Hear, Alfred, hero of the state,
> Thy genius heaven's high will declare;
> The triumph of the truly great,
> Is never, never to despair—
> Is never to despair.
>
> MASQUE OF ALFRED.

I grant you enter the lists of life, to struggle for bread, business, notice, and distinction, in common with hundreds. But who are they? Men like yourself, and of that aggregate body your compeers, seven-tenths of them come short of your advantages, natural and accidental; while two of those that remain, either neglect their parts, as flowers blooming in a desert, or misspend their strength like a bull goring a bramble bush.

But to change the theme: I am still catering for Johnson's publication; and among others, I have brushed up the following old favourite song a little, with a view to your worship.[1] I have only altered a word here and there; but if you like the humour of it, we shall think of a stanza or two to add to it.

R. B.

TO MR. M'MURDO.

ELLISLAND, 19th Jan. 1789.

SIR,

A poet and a beggar are, in so many points of view, alike, that one might take them for the same individual character under different designations; were it not that though, with a trifling poetic license, most poets may be styled beggars, yet the converse of the proposition does not hold, that every beggar is a poet. In one particular, however, they remarkably agree: if you help either the one or the other to a mug of ale, or the picking of a bone, they will very willingly repay you with a song. This occurs to me at present, as I have just despatched a well-lined rib of J. Kilpatrick's Highlander;[2] a bargain for which I am indebted to you, in the style of our ballad printers, "Five excellent new songs." The inclosed is nearly my newest song, and one that has cost me some pains, though that is but an equivocal mark of its excellence. Two or three others,

[1] This is the song, "Robin shure in Hairst."

[2] This has been explained to be an allusion to a piece of Highland mutton which M'Murdo had bought from Kilpatrick, and presented to the poet.

which I have by me, shall do themselves the honour to wait on your after leisure: petitioners for admittance into favour, must not harass the condescension of their benefactor.

You see, Sir, what it is to patronise a poet. 'Tis like being a magistrate in a petty borough; you do them the favour to preside in their council for one year, and your name bears the prefatory stigma of Bailie for life.

With, not the compliments, but the best wishes, the sincerest prayers of the season for you, that you may see many and happy years with Mrs. M'Murdo, and your family; two blessings, by the bye, to which your rank does not, by any means, entitle you; a loving wife and fine family being almost the only good things of this life to which the farm-house and cottage have an exclusive right, I have the honour to be, Sir, your much indebted, and very humble servant,

R. B.

TO PROFESSOR DUGALD STEWART.[1]

ELLISLAND, 20th Jan. 1789.

SIR,

The inclosed sealed packet I sent to Edinburgh, a few days after I had the happiness of meeting you in Ayrshire, but you were gone for the continent. I have now added a few more of my productions, those for which I am indebted to the Nithsdale Muses. The piece inscribed to R. G. Esq. is a copy of verses I sent Mr. Graham of Fintry, accompanying a request for his assistance in a matter to me of very great moment.[2] To that gentleman I am already doubly indebted; for deeds of kindness of serious import to my dearest interests, done in a manner grateful to the delicate feelings of sensibility. This poem is a species of composition new to me, but I do not intend it shall be my last essay of the kind, as you will see by the "Poet's Progress." These fragments, if my design succeed, are but a small part of the intended whole. I propose it shall be the work of my utmost exertions, ripened by years; of course I do not wish it much known. The fragment beginning "A little, upright, pert, tart," &c. I have not shown to man living, till I now send it you.[3] It forms the postulata, the axioms, the definition of a character, which, if it appear at all, shall be placed in a variety of lights. This particular part I send you merely as a sample of my hand at portrait-sketching; but, lest idle conjecture should pretend to point out the original, please to let it be for your single, sole inspection.

Need I make any apology for this trouble, to a gentleman who has treated me with such marked benevolence and peculiar kindness; who has entered into my interests with so much zeal, and on whose critical decisions I can so fully depend? A poet as I am by trade, these decisions are to me of the last consequence. My late transient acquaintance among some of the mere rank and file of greatness, I resign with ease; but to the distinguished champions of genius and learning, I shall be ever ambitious of being known. The native genius and accurate discernment in Mr. Stewart's critical strictures; the justness (iron justice, for he has no bowels of compassion for a poor poetic sinner) of Dr. Gregory's remarks, and the delicacy of Professor Dalzell's[4] taste, I shall ever revere.

[1] The attention of Dugald Stewart was drawn to Burns through the Kilmarnock edition of the poems (1786); and not long after their publication the poet was a visitor at Catrine, the Ayrshire residence of the celebrated philosopher, not many miles from Mossgiel. On his first visit Burns met the young Lord Daer, son of the Earl of Selkirk, and this, his first meeting face to face with a live lord, drew from him the "Lines on meeting Lord Daer." The professor's account of this meeting, and of Burns then and afterwards, so far as he came in personal contact with him, will be found in the Appendix to Lockhart's *Life*, in volume i

Dugald Stewart was the son of Dr. Matthew Stewart, professor of mathematics in the University of Edinburgh, and was born there in 1753. The father (who died in 1785) and the son are together referred to in the "Vision" as "The learned sire and son." The son was appointed assistant and successor to his father, but did not long hold the chair of mathematics, having exchanged it for that of moral philosophy. In 1806, being appointed gazette-writer for Scotland with a salary of £600, he retired from the active duties of his chair, and henceforth lived at Kinneil House on the Firth of Forth. He died in 1828. His most important work is that on the *Philosophy of the Human Mind*.

[2] The poetical epistle to Graham of Fintry beginning:—

When Nature her great master-piece design'd.

[3] See "The Poet's Progress" and note, vol. iii. 15.

[4] Professor of Greek in Edinburgh University.

I shall be in Edinburgh some time next month.

I have the honour to be, Sir, your highly obliged, and very humble servant,

R. B.

[TO THE HON. HENRY ERSKINE.?[1]]

ELLISLAND, 22nd January, 1789.

SIR,

There are two things which, I believe, the blow that terminates my existence alone can destroy—my attachment and propensity to poetry, and my sense of what I owe to your goodness. There is nothing in the different situations of a Great and a Little man that vexes me more than the ease with which the one practises some virtues that to the other are so extremely difficult, or perhaps wholly impracticable. A man of consequence and fashion shall richly repay a deed of kindness with a nod and a smile, or a hearty shake of the hand; while a poor fellow labours under a sense of gratitude, which, like copper coin, though it loads the bearer, is yet of small account in the currency and commerce of the world. As I have the honour, Sir, to stand in the poor fellow's predicament with respect to you, will you accept of a device I have thought on to acknowledge these obligations I can never cancel? Mankind in general agree in testifying their devotion, their gratitude, their friendship, or their love, by presenting whatever they hold dearest. Everybody who is in the least acquainted with the character of a Poet, knows that there is nothing in the world on which he sets so much [value as his verses. I have resolved, Sir, from time][2] to time, as she may bestow her favours, to present you with the productions of my humble Muse. The enclosed are the principal of her works on the banks of the Nith. The Poem inscribed to R. G. Esq. is some verses, accompanying a request, which I sent to Mr. Graham of Fintry—a gentleman who has given double value to some important favours he has bestowed on me by his manner of doing them, and on whose future patronage likewise I must depend for matters to me of the last consequence.

I have no great faith in the boasted pretensions to intuitive propriety and unlaboured elegance. The rough material of Fine Writing is certainly the gift of Genius, but I as firmly believe that the workmanship is the united effort of Pains, Attention, and Repeated-trial. The piece addressed to Mr. Graham is my first essay in that didactic, epistolary way; which circumstance I hope will bespeak your indulgence. To your friend Captain Erskine's[3] strictures I lay claim as a relation; not, indeed, that I have the honour to be akin to the peerage, but because he is a son of Parnassus.

I intend being in Edinburgh in four or five weeks, when I shall certainly do myself the honour of waiting on you, to testify with what respect and gratitude, &c. R. B.

TO ROBERT CLEGHORN, FARMER,

SAUGHTON MILLS.

ELLISLAND, NEAR DUMFRIES, 23rd Jan. 1789.

I must take shame and confusion of face to myself, my dear friend and brother farmer, that I have not written you much sooner. The truth is, I have been so tossed about between Ayrshire and Nithsdale, that, till now I have got my family here, I have had time to think of nothing except now and then a distich or stanza as I rode along. Were it not for our gracious Monarch's cursed tax of postage, I had sent you one or two pieces of some length that I have lately done. I have no idea of the *Press*. I am more able to support myself and family, though in a humble, yet an independent way; and I mean, just at my leisure, to pay my court to the tuneful Sisters, in hopes that they may one day enable me to carry on a Work of some importance. The following are a few verses I wrote in a neighbouring Gentleman's *Hermitage*, to which he is so good as to let me have a key.[4]

[1] The above letter, first published by Chambers in 1852, bears no address, but that careful editor subsequently suggested the name of the addressee as we have given it. The date on the original is 22nd January, 1788, which is obviously a blunder.

[2] The words between brackets have been supplied by Chambers on conjecture to make up a blank in the original.

[3] The Hon. Andrew Erskine. See note to letter of 20th Jan. 1793 in the Thomson Correspondence.

[4] Here follow the "Verses written in Friars' Carse Hermitage." See vol. iii. p. 13.

I shall be in Edinburgh for a few days some time about latter end of February or beginning of March, when I will show you my other pieces. My farming scheme too—particularly the management of one, inclusive of Holming land—is to be decided by your superior judgment. I find, if my farm does well with me, I shall certainly be an enthusiast in the business.

R. B.

TO MR. JAMES JOHNSON, ENGRAVER,

BELL'S WYND, EDINBURGH.

ELLISLAND, 23rd January, 1789.

CALEDONIA, A BALLAD.

There was once a day, but old Time then was young, &c. —See vol. iii. p. 22.

I shall be in Edinburgh, my dear Sir, in about a month, when we shall overhaul the whole collection and report progress.

The foregoing I hope will suit the excellent air it is designed for. Adieu till next week,

R. B.

TO MR. DAVID BLAIR, GUN-MAKER,

ST. PAUL'S SQUARE, BIRMINGHAM.

ELLISLAND, 23rd January, 1789.

MY DEAR SIR,

My honour has lien bleeding these two months almost, as 'tis near that time since I received your kind though short epistle of the 29th October. The defensive tools[1] do more than half mankind do, they do honour to their maker; but I trust that with me they shall have the fate of a miser's gold—to be often admired, but never used.

Long before your letter came to hand, I sent you, by way of Mr. Nicol, a copy of the book, and a proof copy of the print, loose among the leaves of the book. These, I hope, are safe in your possession some time ago. If I could think of any other channel of communication with you than the villainous expensive one of the Post, I could send you a parcel of my Rhymes; partly as a small return for your kind, handsome compliment, and much more as a mark of my sincere esteem and respect for Mr. Blair. A piece I did lately I shall try to cram into this letter, as I think the turn of thought may perhaps please you.[2]

I remember with pleasure, my dear Sir, a visit you talked of paying to Dumfries, in Spring or Summer. I shall only say, I have never parted with a man, after so little acquaintance, whom I more ardently wish to see again. At your first convenience a line to inform me of an affair in which I am much interested—just an answer to the question, How you do? will highly oblige, my dear Sir, yours very sincerely,

R. B.

[1] These "defensive tools" were a pair of pistols presented to the poet by Blair, and by the poet shortly before his death to Dr. William Maxwell, his principal medical attendant. They came into the possession of Bishop Gillies of Edinburgh, by whom they were presented to the Society of Scottish Antiquaries in January, 1859.

[2] Here follow the "Verses written in Friars' Carse Hermitage."

TO ALEXANDER CUNNINGHAM, ESQ.,

WRITER, EDINBURGH.

ELLISLAND, 24th January, 1789.

MY DEAR CUNNINGHAM,

When I saw in my last newspaper that a Surgeon in Edinburgh was married to a certain amiable and accomplished young lady whose name begins with Ann;[3] a lady with whom I fancy I have the honour of being a little acquainted, I sincerely felt for a much esteemed friend of mine. As you are the single only instance that ever came within the sphere of my observation of human nature, of a young fellow, dissipated but not debauched, a circumstance that has ever given me the highest idea of the native qualites of your heart, I am certain that a disappointment in the tender passion must, to you, be a very serious matter. To the hopeful youth, keen on the badger foot of Mammon, or listed under the gaudy banners of ambition, a love-disappointment, as such, is an easy business; nay, perhaps he hugs him-

[3] Miss Anne Stewart was married to Mr. Forrest Dewar, surgeon, on the 13th January, 1789. See note to verses beginning:—

"My god-like friend—nay, do not stare."

—Vol. ii. p. 254.

self on his escape; but to your scanty tribe of mankind, whose souls bear, on the richest materials, the most elegant impress of the Great Creator, LOVE enters deeply into their existence, and is entwined with their very thread of life. I can myself affirm, both from bachelor and wedlock experience, that Love is the Alpha and Omega of human enjoyment. All the pleasures, all the happiness of my humble compeers flow immediately and directly from this delicious source. It is the spark of celestial fire which lights up the wintry hut of poverty, and makes the cheerful mansion warm, comfortable and gay. It is the emanation of divinity that preserves the sons and daughters of rustic labour from degenerating into the brutes with which they daily hold converse. Without it, life to the poor inmates of the cottage, would be a very damning gift.

I intended to go on with some kind of consolatory epistle, when, unawares, I flew off in this rhapsodical tangent. Instead of attempting to resume a subject for which I am so ill-qualified, I shall ask your opinion of some verses I have lately begun on a theme of which you are the best judge I ever saw. It is Love too; though not just warranted by the law of nations. A married lady of my acquaintance, whose *crim. con.* amour with a certain Captain made some noise in the world, is supposed to write to him, now in the West Indies, as follows:—

By all I lov'd, neglected and forgot, &c.[1]

TO ROBERT RIDDELL, ESQ.,

OF FRIARS' CARSE.

ELLISLAND, 1789.

SIR,

I wish from my inmost soul it were in my power to give you a more substantial gratification and return for all your goodness to the poet, than transcribing a few of his idle rhymes.—However, "an old song," though, to a proverb, an instance of insignificance, is generally the only coin a poet has to pay with.

If my poems which I have transcribed, and mean still to transcribe into your book, were equal to the grateful respect and high esteem I bear for the gentleman to whom I present them, they would be the finest poems in the language.—As they are, they will at least be a testimony with what sincerity I have the honour to be, Sir, your devoted humble servant,

R. B.

[1] For the rest of this fragment and the story connected therewith, see vol. iii. p. 21. The second half-sheet of this letter has been torn off The portion here given was first published by Mr. Scott Douglas in Paterson's Edinburgh edition.

TO BISHOP GEDDES.[2]

ELLISLAND, 3d Feb. 1789.

VENERABLE FATHER,

As I am conscious that wherever I am, you do me the honour to interest yourself in my welfare, it gives me pleasure to inform you, that I am here at last, stationary in the serious business of life, and have now not only the retired leisure, but the hearty inclination, to attend to those great and important questions,—what I am? where I am? and for what I am destined?

In that first concern, the conduct of the man, there was ever but one side on which I was habitually blameable, and there I have secured myself in the way pointed out by Nature and Nature's God. I was sensible that, to so helpless a creature as a poor poet, a wife and family were incumbrances, which a species of prudence would bid him shun; but when the alternative was, being at eternal warfare with myself, on account of habitual follies, to give them no worse name, which no general example, no licentious wit, no sophistical infidelity, would, to me, ever justify, I must have been a fool to have hesitated, and a madman to have made another choice. Besides, I had in "my Jean" a long and much-loved fellow-creature's happiness or misery among my hands, and who could trifle with such a deposit?

[2] Dr. John Geddes, coadjutor bishop of the Roman Catholic church in Edinburgh, and bishop of Morocco *in partibus*, to whom Burns had been introduced by Lord Monboddo. See letter to Mrs. Dunlop, 4th Nov. 1787. He is not to be confounded with his better-known relative Dr. Alexander Geddes, who acted as Roman Catholic priest for a number of years in Banffshire, and latterly made himself notorious for his rationalistic views, expressed in connection with his new translation of the Scriptures. Dr. John Geddes died in 1799, Dr. Alexander in 1802. Alexander was a bit of a poet and song-writer himself; see the reference to him and one of his songs in the Rev. Mr. Skinner's letter to Burns on p. 77.

In the affair of a livelihood, I think myself tolerably secure: I have good hopes of my farm, but should they fail, I have an excise commission, which, on my simple petition, will, at any time, procure me bread. There is a certain stigma affixed to the character of an excise officer, but I do not pretend to borrow honour from my profession; and though the salary be comparatively small, it is luxury to anything that the first twenty-five years of my life taught me to expect. . . .

Thus, with a rational aim and method in life, you may easily guess, my reverend and much honoured friend, that my characteristical trade is not forgotten. I am, if possible, more than ever an enthusiast to the Muses. I am determined to study man and nature, and in that view incessantly; and to try if the ripening and corrections of years can enable me to produce something worth preserving.

You will see in your book, which I beg your pardon for detaining so long, that I have been tuning my lyre on the banks of Nith.[1] Some large poetic plans that are floating in my imagination, or partly put in execution, I shall impart to you when I have the pleasure of meeting with you; which, if you are then in Edinburgh, I shall have about the beginning of March.

That acquaintance, worthy Sir, with which you were pleased to honour me, you must still allow me to challenge; for with whatever unconcern I give up my transient connexion with the mere Great (those self-important beings whose intrinsic worthlessness is often concealed under the accidental advantages of their birth), I cannot lose the patronizing notice of the Learned and Good, without the bitterest regret.

R. B.

ADDRESS OF THE SCOTCH DISTILLERS TO THE RIGHT HON. WILLIAM PITT.

[ELLISLAND, Feb. 1789.]

SIR,

While pursy burgesses crowd your gate, sweating under the weight of heavy addresses, permit us, the quondam distillers in that part of Great Britain called Scotland, to approach you, not with venal approbation, but with fraternal condolence; not as what you are just now, or for some time have been; but as what, in all probability, you will shortly be.—We shall have the merit of not deserting our friends in the day of their calamity, and you will have the satisfaction of perusing at least one honest address. You are well acquainted with the dissection of human nature; nor do you need the assistance of a fellow-creature's bosom to inform you, that man is always a selfish, often a perfidious being. This assertion, however the hasty conclusions of superficial observation may doubt of it, or the raw inexperience of youth may deny it, those who make the fatal experiment we have done, will feel.—You are a statesman, and consequently are ignorant of the traffic of these corporation compliments.—The little great man who drives the borough to market, and the very great man who buys the borough in that market, they two do the whole business; and you well know they, likewise, have their price. With that sullen disdain which you can so well assume, rise, illustrious Sir, and spurn these hireling efforts of venal stupidity. At best they are the compliments of a man's friends on the morning of his execution: they take a decent farewell; resign you to your fate; and hurry away from your approaching hour.

If fame say true, and omens be not very much mistaken, you are about to make your exit from that world where the sun of gladness gilds the paths of prosperous men: permit us, great Sir, with the sympathy of fellow-feeling, to hail your passage to the realms of ruin. Whether the sentiment proceed from the selfishness or cowardice of mankind is immaterial; but to point out to a child of misfortune those who are still more unhappy, is to give him some degree of positive enjoyment. In this light, Sir, our downfall may be again useful to you:—Though not exactly in the same way, it is not perhaps the first time it has gratified your feelings. It is true, the triumph of your evil star is exceedingly despiteful. At an age when others are the votaries of pleasure, or underlings in business, you had attained the highest wish of a British statesman; and with

[1] This was an interleaved copy of the Edinburgh edition of his poems, in which Burns had undertaken to transcribe a series of notes and a number of unpublished pieces.

the ordinary date of human life, what a prospect was before you! Deeply rooted in *Royal Favour*, you overshadowed the land. The birds of passage, which follow ministerial sunshine through every clime of political faith and manners, flocked to your branches; and the beasts of the field (the lordly possessors of hills and valleys,) crowded under your shade. "But behold a watcher, a holy one, came down from heaven, and cried aloud, and said thus: Hew down the tree, and cut off his branches; shake off his leaves, and scatter his fruit; let the beasts get away from under it, and the fowls from his branches!" A blow from an unthought-of quarter, one of those terrible accidents which peculiarly mark the hand of Omnipotence, overset your career, and laid all your fancied honours in the dust. But turn your eyes, Sir, to the tragic scenes of our fate. —An ancient nation, that for many ages had gallantly maintained the unequal struggle for independence with her much more powerful neighbour, at last agrees to a union which should ever after make them one people. In consideration of certain circumstances, it was covenanted that the former should enjoy a stipulated alleviation in her share of the public burdens, particularly in that branch of the revenue called the Excise. This just privilege has of late given great umbrage to some interested, powerful individuals of the more potent part of the empire, and they have spared no wicked pains, under insidious pretexts, to subvert what they dared not openly to attack, from the dread which they yet entertained of the spirit of their ancient enemies.

In this conspiracy we fell; nor did we alone suffer—our country was deeply wounded. A number of (we will say) respectable individuals, largely engaged in trade, where we were not only useful but absolutely necessary to our country in her dearest interests: we, with all that was near and dear to us, were sacrificed without remorse, to the infernal deity of political Expediency, not that sound policy the good of the whole. We fell to gratify the wishes of dark Envy, and the views of unprincipled Ambition! Your foes, Sir, were avowed; were too brave to take an ungenerous advantage; *you* fell in the face of day.—On the contrary, our enemies, to complete our overthrow, contrived to make their guilt appear the villany of a nation.—Your downfall only drags with you your private friends and partisans: in our misery are more or less involved the most numerous and most valuable part of the community—all those who immediately depend on the cultivation of the soil, from the landlord of a province down to his lowest hind.

Allow us, Sir, yet farther, just to hint at another rich vein of comfort in the dreary regions of adversity;—the gratulations of an approving conscience. In a certain great assembly, of which you are a distinguished member, panegyrics on your private virtues have so often wounded your delicacy, that we shall not distress you with any thing on the subject. There is, however, one part of your public conduct which our feelings will not permit us to pass in silence; our gratitude must trespass on your modesty; we mean, worthy Sir, your whole behaviour to the Scots Distillers.—In evil hours, when obtrusive recollection presses bitterly on the sense, let that, Sir, come like a healing angel, and speak the peace to your soul which the world can neither give nor take away.

We have the honour to be, Sir, your sympathizing fellow sufferers, and grateful humble servants,

JOHN BARLEYCORN—Præses.

TO MR. JAMES BURNESS.

ELLISLAND, 9th Feb. 1789.

MY DEAR SIR,

Why I did not write to you long ago is what, even on the rack, I could not answer. If you can in your mind form an idea of indolence,

[1] This sarcastic address in the style of Junius was transcribed by its author into the Glenriddell volume of letters, where it is headed as follows:—

"At the juncture of the king's illness while the Regency Bill was pending, and when everybody expected the Premier's downfall, addresses crowded in to him from all quarters, and among the rest the following appeared in a newspaper. The addressers, the late Distillers of Scotland, had just been ruined by a positive breach of the public faith in a most partial tax laid on by the House of Commons to favour a few opulent English distillers who, it seems, were of vast electioneering consequence." The Regency Bill passed the House of Commons in Feby. 1789, but was dropped as the king (George III.) soon afterwards recovered from his mental disorder.

dissipation, hurry, cares, change of country, entering on untried scenes of life, all combined, you will save me the trouble of a blushing apology. It could not be want of regard for a man for whom I had a high esteem before I knew him,—an esteem which has much increased since I did know him; and this caveat entered, I shall plead guilty to any other indictment with which you shall please to charge me.

After I parted from you, for many months my life was one continued scene of dissipation. Here at last I am become stationary, and have taken a farm and—a wife. The farm is beautifully situated on the Nith, a large river that runs by Dumfries, and falls into the Solway frith. I have got a lease of my farm as long as I pleased; but how it may turn out is just a guess, and it is yet to improve and inclose, &c.; however, I have good hopes of my bargain on the whole.

My wife is my Jean, with whose story you are partly acquainted. I found I had a much-loved fellow-creature's happiness or misery among my hands, and I durst not trifle with so sacred a deposit. Indeed I have not any reason to repent the step I have taken, as I have attached myself to a very good wife, and have shaken myself loose of a very bad failing.

I have found my book a very profitable business, and with the profits of it I have begun life pretty decently. Should fortune not favour me in farming, as I have no great faith in her fickle ladyship, I have provided myself in another resource, which, however some folks may affect to despise it, is still a comfortable shift in the day of misfortune. In the hey-day of my fame, a gentleman, whose name at least I daresay you know, as his estate lies somewhere near Dundee, Mr. Graham of Fintry, one of the Commissioners of Excise, offered me the commission of an excise-officer. I thought it prudent to accept the offer; and accordingly I took my instructions, and have my commission by me. Whether I may ever do duty, or be a penny the better for it, is what I do not know; but I have the comfortable assurance, that, come whatever ill fate will, I can, on my simple petition to the excise-board, get into employ.

We have lost poor uncle Robert[1] this winter. He has long been very weak, and, with very little alteration on him, he expired 3d January. His son William has been with me this winter, and goes in May to bind himself to be a mason with my father-in-law, who is a pretty considerable architect in Ayrshire. His other son, the eldest, John, comes to me I expect in summer. They are both remarkably stout young fellows, and promise to do well. His only daughter, Fanny, has been with me ever since her father's death, and I purpose keeping her in my family till she be quite woman grown, and fit for better service. She is one of the cleverest girls, and has one of the most amiable dispositions I have ever seen.[2]

All friends in this country and Ayrshire are well. Remember me to all friends in the north. My wife joins me in compliments to your bedfellow and family. I would write your brother-in-law, but have lost his address. For goodness' sake, don't take example by me, but write me soon.

I am ever, my dear cousin, yours, sincerely,

R. B.

[1] Brother of the poet's father. He lived at Stewarton in Ayrshire.

TO MR. WILLIAM BURNS, LONGTOWN.[3]

ISLE,[4] 2nd March, 1789.

MY DEAR WILLIAM,

I arrived from Edinburgh only the night before last, so I could not answer your epistle sooner.[5] I congratulate you on the prospect

[2] "Fanny Burns, the poet's relation, merited all the commendations he has here bestowed. I remember her while she lived at Ellisland, and better still as the wife of Adam Armour, the brother of bonnie Jean; she went with her husband to Mauchline, and lived long and respectably. Her son is now with his paternal uncle, pursuing successfully the honourable calling of a London merchant."—CUNNINGHAM.

[3] The poet's youngest surviving brother, who was brought up as a saddler at Mauchline. He had paid a visit of several weeks' duration to his brother about a month previously, and had crossed the border in search of employment. Longtown is in Cumberland, not far from the Scottish border.

[4] An old tower with some modern farm-buildings attached about a mile from Ellisland, where the poet found a temporary residence while his house was building.

[5] This alludes to a short visit paid to Edinburgh in the end of February for the purpose of arriving at a final settlement with Creech in connection with the profits of his second edition, and in this respect the visit was successful.

of employ; and I am indebted to you for one of the best letters that has been written by any mechanic-lad in Nithsdale, or Annandale, or any dale on either side of the border, this twelvemonth.[1] Not that I would have you always affect the stately stilts of studied composition, but surely writing a handsome letter is an accomplishment worth courting; and, with attention and practice, I can promise you that it will be an accomplishment of yours. If my advice can serve you—that is to say, if you can resolve to accustom yourself not only in reviewing your own deportment, manners, &c., but also in carrying your consequent resolutions of amending the faulty parts into practice—my small knowledge and experience of the world is heartily at your service. I intended to have given you a sheetful of counsels, but some business has prevented me. In a word, learn *taciturnity;* let that be your motto. Though you had the wisdom of Newton, or the wit of Swift, garrulousness would lower you in the eyes of your fellow-creatures. I'll probably write you next week.—I am, your brother,

R. B.

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

ELLISLAND, 4th March, 1789.

Here am I, my honoured friend, returned safe from the capital. To a man who has a home, however humble or remote—if that home is like mine, the scene of domestic comfort—the bustle of Edinburgh will soon be a business of sickening disgust.

Vain pomp and glory of this world, I hate you!

When I must skulk into a corner, lest the rattling equipage of some gaping blockhead should mangle me in the mire, I am tempted to exclaim—"What merits has he had, or what demerits have I had, in some state of pre-existence, that he is ushered into this state of being with the sceptre of rule, and the key of riches in his puny fist, and I am kicked into the world, the sport of folly or the victim of pride?"

I have read somewhere of a monarch, (in Spain I think it was,) who was so out of humour with the Ptolemean system of astro-

[1] The epistle thus flatteringly noticed may be of interest to our readers; we, therefore, give it in full.

LONGTOWN, Feb. 15th, 1789.

DEAR SIR,

As I am now in a manner only entering into the world, I begin this our correspondence, with a view of being a gainer by your advice, more than ever you can be by anything I can write you of what I see or what I hear in the course of my wanderings. I know not how it happened, but you were more shy of your counsel than I could have wished the time I staid with you; whether it was because you thought it would disgust me to have my faults freely told me while I was dependent on you; or whether it was because you saw that by my indolent disposition, your instructions could have no effect, I cannot determine; but if it proceeded from any of the above causes, the reason of withholding your admonition is now done away with, for I now stand on my own bottom, and that indolence which I am very conscious of, is something rubbed off by being called to act in life whether I will or not; and my inexperience, which I daily feel, makes me wish for that advice which you are so able to give, and which I can only expect from you or Gilbert, since the loss of the kindest and ablest of fathers.

The morning after I went from the Isle, I left Dumfries about five o'clock and came to Annan to breakfast, and staid about an hour; and I reached this place about two o'clock. I have got work here, and I intend to stay a month or six weeks and then go forward, as I wish to be at York about the latter end of summer, where I propose to spend next winter, and go on for London in the spring.

I have the promise of seven shillings a week from Mr. Proctor while I stay here, and sixpence more if he succeeds himself, for he has only newly begun trade here. I am to pay four shillings a week of board wages, so that my neat income here will be much the same as in Dumfries.

The inclosed you will send to Gilbert with the first opportunity. Please send me the first Wednesday after you receive this, by the Carlisle waggon, two of my coarse shirts, one of my best linen ones, my velveteen vest, and a neckcloth; write to me along with them, and direct to me, Saddler in Longtown, and they will not miscarry, for I am boarded in the waggoner's house. You may either let them be given in to the waggon, or send them to Coulthard and Gellebourn's shop, and they will forward them. Pray write me often while I stay here.—I wish you would send me a letter, though never so small, every week, for they will be no expense to me and but little trouble to you. Please to give my best wishes to my sister-in-law, and believe me to be your affectionate and obliged brother,

WILLIAM BURNS.

P.S. The great-coat you gave me at parting did me singular service the day I came here, and merits my hearty thanks. From what has been said, the conclusion is this—that my hearty thanks and my best wishes are all that you and my sister must expect from

W. B.

nomy, that he said, had he been of the Creator's council, he could have saved him a great deal of labour and absurdity. I will not defend this blasphemous speech; but often, as I have glided with humble stealth through the pomp of Princes Street, it has suggested itself to me, as an improvement on the present human figure, that a man, in proportion to his own conceit of his consequence in the world, could have pushed out the longitude of his common size, as a snail pushes out his horns, or as we draw out a perspective. This trifling alteration, not to mention the prodigious saving it would be in the tear and wear of the neck and limb sinews of many of his majesty's liege subjects, in the way of tossing the head and tiptoe strutting, would evidently turn out a vast advantage, in enabling us at once to adjust the ceremonials in making a bow, or making way to a great man, and that too within a second of the precise spherical angle of reverence, or an inch of the particular point of respectful distance, which the important creature itself requires; as a measuring glance at its towering altitude would determine the affair like instinct.

You are right, Madam, in your idea of poor Mylne's poem,[1] which he has addressed to me. The piece has a good deal of merit, but it has one great fault—it is by far too long. Besides, my success has encouraged such a shoal of ill-spawned monsters to crawl into public notice, under the title of Scottish Poets, that the very term Scottish Poetry borders on the burlesque. When I write to Mr. Carfrae, I shall advise him rather to try one of his deceased friend's English pieces. I am prodigiously hurried with my own matters, else I would have requested a perusal of all Mylne's poetic performances, and would have offered his friends my assistance in either selecting or correcting what would be proper for the press. What it is that occupies me so much, and perhaps a little oppresses my present spirits, shall fill up a paragraph in some future letter. In the meantime, allow me to close this epistle with a few lines done by a friend of mine. . . . I give you them, that, as you have seen the original, you may guess whether one or two alterations I have ventured to make in them, be any real improvement.

[1] See the succeeding letter to the Rev. P. Carfrae.

Like the fair plant that from our touch withdraws,
Shrink, mildly fearful, even from applause,
Be all a mother's fondest hope can dream,
And all you are, my charming . . . , seem.
Straight as the fox-glove, ere her bells disclose,
Mild as the maiden-blushing hawthorn blows,
Fair as the fairest of each lovely kind,
Your form shall be the image of your mind;
Your manners shall so true your soul express,
That all shall long to know the worth they guess;
Congenial hearts shall greet with kindred love,
And even sick'ning envy must approve.[2]

R. B.

TO THE REV. P. CARFRAE.[3]

[March,] 1789.

REV. SIR,

I do not recollect to have ever felt a severer pang of shame, than on looking at the date of your obliging letter which accompanied Mr. Mylne's poem.

I am much to blame; the honour Mr. Mylne has done me, greatly enhanced in its value by the endearing, though melancholy circumstances, of its being the last production of his muse, deserved a better return.

I have, as you hint, thought of sending a copy of the poem to some periodical publication; but, on second thoughts, I am afraid that, in the present case, it would be an improper step. My success, perhaps as much accidental as merited, has brought an inundation of nonsense under the name of Scottish poetry. Subscription-bills for Scottish poems, have so dunned and daily do dun the public, that the very name is in danger of contempt. For these reasons, if publishing any of Mr. Mylne's poems in a magazine, &c., be at all prudent, in my

[2] "These beautiful lines, we have reason to believe, are the production of the lady to whom this letter is addressed."—CURRIE. They form part of a poem which Mrs. Dunlop had addressed to her daughter Rachel, on her birthday. She had sent them to her famous correspondent for his inspection, and he here copies them with a few suggested emendations.

[3] The above clergyman, a friend of Mrs. Dunlop, had written to Burns on the 2nd January, 1789, inclosing a poem by a young Lothian farmer called Mylne (then recently cut off by an inflammatory fever), in the form of an address to Burns in the Scots dialect, on the publication of his poems. Mr. Carfrae wished Burns's opinion as to the propriety of publishing this address, together with some others of his pieces, for the advantage of his family. The above is the reply to that letter.

opinion it certainly should not be a Scottish poem. The profits of the labours of a man of genius, are, I hope, as honourable as any profits whatever; and Mr. Mylne's relations are most justly entitled to that honest harvest which fate has denied himself to reap. But let the friends of Mr. Mylne's fame (among whom I crave the honour of ranking myself,) always keep in eye his respectability as a man and as a poet, and take no measure, that, before the world knows any thing about him, would risk his name and character being classed with the fools of the times.

I have, Sir, some experience of publishing; and the way in which I would proceed with Mr. Mylne's poems is this:—I would publish in two or three English and Scottish public papers, any one of his English poems which should, by private judges, be thought the most excellent, and mention it, at the same time, as one of the productions of a Lothian farmer, of respectable character, lately deceased, whose poems his friends had it in idea to publish soon by subscription, for the sake of his numerous family; not in pity to that family, but in justice to what his friends think the poetic merits of the deceased; and to secure, in the most effectual manner, to those tender connexions, whose right it is, the pecuniary reward of those merits.[1]

R. B.

TO MR. WILLIAM BURNS,

LONGTOWN.

ISLE, Tuesday even, [10th March, 1789.]

DEAR WILLIAM,

In my last, I recommended that invaluable apophthegm—learn taciturnity.

It is absolutely certain that nobody can know our thoughts; and yet, from a slight observation of mankind, one would not think so. What mischiefs daily arise from silly garrulity, or foolish confidence! There is an excellent Scots saying, that "A man's mind is his kingdom." It is certainly so; but how few can govern that kingdom with propriety?

The serious mischiefs in business which this flux of language occasions, do not come immediately to your situation; but in another point of view, the dignity of the man, now is the time that will either make or mar you. Yours is the time of life for laying in habits; you cannot avoid it, though you should choose; and these habits will stick to your last sand. At after periods, even at so little advance as my years, 'tis true, one may still be very sharp-sighted to one's habitual failings and weaknesses; but to eradicate or even amend them, is quite a different matter. Acquired at first by accident, they by and bye begin to be as it were *convenient*, and in time are in a manner a *necessary* part of our existence. I have not time for more. Whatever you read, whatever you hear, concerning the ways and works of that strange creature, Man, look into the living world about you—look into yourself for the evidence of the fact, or the application of the doctrine. I am, ever yours,

R. B.

TO DR. MOORE.

ELLISLAND, 23d March, 1789.

SIR,

The gentleman who will deliver you this is a Mr. Nielson,[2] a worthy clergyman in my neighbourhood, and a very particular acquaintance of mine. As I have troubled him with this packet, I must turn him over to your goodness, to recompense him for it in a way in which he much needs your assistance, and where you can effectually serve him. Mr. Nielson is on his way for France, to wait on his Grace of Queensberry, on some little business of a good deal of importance to him, and he wishes for your instructions respecting the most eligible mode of travelling, &c. for him, when he has crossed the channel. I should not have dared to take this liberty with you, but that I am told, by those who have the honour of your personal acquaintance, that to be a poor honest Scotchman is a letter of recommendation to you, and that to have it in your power to serve such a character, gives you much pleasure.

[1] An 8vo volume of these poems, including two tragedies, was published by William Creech, Edinburgh, in 1790.

[2] The Rev. Edward Nielson, minister of Kirkbean, in Kirkcudbrightshire—according to Allan Cunningham a jovial, as well as eloquent and learned, clergyman.

The inclosed ode is a compliment to the memory of the late Mrs. Oswald of Auchincruive.[1] You, probably, knew her personally, an honour of which I cannot boast; but I spent my early years in her neighbourhood, and among her servants and tenants I know that she was detested with the most heartfelt cordiality. However, in the particular part of her conduct which roused my poetic wrath, she was much less blameable. In January last, on my road to Ayrshire, I had put up at Bailie Whigham's in Sanquhar, the only tolerable inn in the place. The frost was keen, and the grim evening and howling wind were ushering in a night of snow and drift. My horse and I were both much fatigued with the labours of the day; and just as my friend the Bailie and I were bidding defiance to the storm, over a smoking bowl, in wheels the funeral pageantry of the late great Mrs. Oswald, and poor I am forced to brave all the horrors of the tempestuous night, and jade my horse, my young favourite horse, whom I had just christened Pegasus, twelve miles farther on, through the wildest moors and hills of Ayrshire, to New Cumnock, the next inn. The powers of poesy and prose sink under me, when I would describe what I felt. Suffice it to say, that when a good fire at New Cumnock had so far recovered my frozen sinews, I sat down and wrote the inclosed ode.

I was at Edinburgh lately, and settled finally with Mr. Creech; and I must own, that, at last, he has been amicable and fair with me.[2]

R. B.

[1] See page 19, vol. iii.

[2] Dr. Moore's answer to the above letter was as follows:

"CLIFFORD-STREET, 10th June, 1789.

"DEAR SIR,

"I thank you for the different communications you have made me of your occasional productions in manuscript, all of which have merit, and some of them merit of a different kind from what appears in the poems you have published. You ought carefully to preserve all your occasional productions, to correct and improve them at your leisure; and when you can select as many of these as will make a volume, publish it either at Edinburgh or London by subscription: on such an occasion it may be in my power, as it is very much in my inclination, to be of service to you.

"If I were to offer an opinion, it would be, that, in your future productions, you should abandon the Scottish stanza and dialect, and adopt the measure and language of modern English poetry.

"The stanza which you use in imitation of 'Christ's Kirk on the Green,' with the tiresome repetition of 'that day,' is fatiguing to English ears, and I should think not very agreeable to Scottish.

"All the fine satire and humour of your 'Holy Fair' is lost on the English; yet, without more trouble to yourself, you could have conveyed the whole to them. The same is true of some of your other poems. In your 'Epistle to J. S———,' the stanzas from that beginning with this line, 'This life, so far's I understand,' to that which ends with, 'Short while it grieves,' are easy, flowing, gaily philosophical, and of Horatian elegance,—the language is English, with a few Scottish words, and some of those so harmonious as to add to the beauty; for what poet would not prefer *gloaming* to *twilight*.

"I imagine, that, by carefully keeping, and occasionally polishing and correcting those verses which the muse dictates, you will, within a year or two, have another volume, as large as the first, ready for the press; and this, without diverting you from every proper attention to the study and practice of husbandry, in which I understand you are very learned, and which I fancy you will choose to adhere to as a wife, while poetry amuses you from time to time as a mistress. The former, like a prudent wife, must not show ill-humour, although you retain a sneaking kindness to this agreeable gypsy, and pay her occasional visits, which in no manner alienates your heart from your lawful spouse, but tends, on the contrary, to promote her interest.

"I desired Mr. Caddel to write to Mr. Creech to send you a copy of *Zeluco*. This performance has had great success here; but I shall be glad to have your opinion of it, because I value your opinion, and because I know you are above saying what you do not think.

"I beg you will offer my best wishes to my very good friend, Mrs. Hamilton, who, I understand, is your neighbour. If she is as happy as I wish her, she is happy enough. Make my compliments also to Mrs. Burns; and believe me to be, with sincere esteem,

"Dear Sir, yours, &c."

TO MR. WILLIAM BURNS.

ISLE, March 25th, 1789.

I have stolen from my corn-sowing this minute to write a line to accompany your shirt and hat, for I can no more. Your sister Nannie arrived yesternight, and begs to be remembered to you. Write me every opportunity—never mind postage. My head, too, is as addle as an egg this morning, with dining abroad yesterday. I received yours by the mason. Forgive me this foolish-looking scrawl of an epistle.

I am ever, my dear William, yours,

R. B.

P.S.—If you are not then gone from Longtown, I'll write you a long letter by this day se'nnight. If you should not succeed in your tramps, don't be dejected, nor take any rash step—return to us in that case, and we will court Fortune's better humour. Remember this, I charge you.

R. B.

TO MR. PETER HILL.

ELLISLAND, 2d April, 1789.

I will make no excuse, my dear Bibliopolus, (God forgive me for murdering language!) that I have sat down to write you on this vile paper stained with the sanguinary scores of "thae cursed horse-leeches o' the Excise." It is economy, Sir; it is that cardinal virtue, prudence; so I beg you will sit down, and either compose or borrow a panegyric: (if you are going to borrow, apply to our friend Ramsay[1] for the assistance of the author of those pretty little buttering paragraphs of eulogiums on your thrice-honoured, and never-enough-to-be-praised Magistracy—how they hunt down a housebreaker with the sanguinary perseverance of a bloodhound—how they outdo a terrier in a badger-hole in unearthing a resettor of stolen goods—how they steal on a thoughtless troop of night-nymphs as a spaniel winds the unsuspecting covey—or how they riot over a ravaged bawdy-house as a cat does o'er a plundered mouse-nest—how they new-vamp old churches, aiming at appearances of piety; plan squares and colleges to pass for men of taste and learning, &c., &c., &c., while old Edinburgh like the doating mother of a parcel of rake-helly prodigals, may sing "Hooly and Fairly," or "Wae's me that ever I saw ye!" but still must put her hand in her pocket and pay whatever scores the young dogs think proper to contract). I was going to say—but this d—n'd parenthesis has put me out of breath—that you should get that manufacturer of the tinselled crockery of magisterial reputations who makes so distinguished a figure in the *Ery. Courant*, to compose, or rather to compound, something very clever on my remarkable frugality; that I write to one of my most esteemed friends on this wretched paper, which was originally intended for the venal fist of some drunken exciseman, to take dirty notes in a miserable vault of an ale-cellar.

O Frugality! thou mother of ten thousand blessings,—thou cook of fat beef and dainty greens!—thou manufacturer of warm Shetland hose, and comfortable surtouts!—thou old housewife, darning thy decayed stockings with thy ancient spectacles on thy aged nose!—lead me, hand me in thy clutching palsied fist, up those heights, and through those thickets, hitherto inaccessible and impervious to my anxious, weary feet:—not those d—n'd Parnassian crags, bleak and barren, where the hungry worshippers of fame are, breathless, clambering, hanging between heaven and hell; but those glittering cliffs of Potosi, where the all-sufficient, all-powerful deity, Wealth, holds his immediate court of joys and pleasures; where the sunny exposure of Plenty, and the hot walls of Profusion, produce those blissful fruits of Luxury, exotics in this world, and natives of Paradise!—Thou withered sibyl, my sage conductress, usher me into the refulgent, adored Presence!—The Power, splendid and potent as he now is, was once the puling nursling of thy faithful care and tender arms! Call me thy son, thy cousin, thy kinsman, or favourite, and adjure the God by the scenes of his infant years, no longer to repulse me as a stranger, or an alien, but to favour me with his peculiar countenance and protection! He daily bestows his greatest kindness on the undeserving and the worthless,—assure him that I bring ample documents of meritorious demerits! Pledge yourself for me, that, for the glorious cause of lucre, I will do any thing, be any thing—but the horse-leech of private oppression, or the vulture of public robbery!!!!

But to descend from heroics. What in the name of all the devils at once have you done with my trunk? Please let me have it by the first carrier, except his name be Niven; he is a rascal who imposed, or would have imposed on me the other day most infamously.

I want a Shakspeare: let me know what plays your used copy of Bell's Shakspeare wants. I want likewise an English dictionary,—Johnson's, I suppose, is best. In these and all my prose commissions, the cheapest is always the best for me. There is a small debt

[1] David Ramsay, editor of the *Edinburgh Evening Courant*.

of honour that I owe Mr. Robert Cleghorn, in Saughton Mills, my worthy friend, and your well-wisher. Please give him, and urge him to take it, the first time you see him, ten shillings worth of any thing you have to sell, and place it to my account.

The library scheme that I mentioned to you is already begun under the direction of Captain Riddell and Me! There is another in emulation of it, going on at Closeburn, under the auspices of Mr. Monteith of Closeburn, which will be on a greater scale than ours. Captain Riddell gave his infant society a great many of his old books, else I had written you on that subject; but, one of these days, I shall trouble you with a commission for "The Monkland Friendly Society,"—a copy of *The Spectator, Mirror,* and *Lounger, Man of Feeling, Man of the World, Guthrie's Geographical Grammar,* with some religious pieces, will likely be our first order.

Write me first post and send me the address of Stuart, publisher of the *Star* newspaper; this I beg particularly, but do not speak of it.[1] I'll expect along with the trunk, my Ainslie's map of Scotland; and if you could send your boy to Mr. Beugo, Engraver, he has a picture of mine a-framing, which will be ready by this time. You see the freedom I take with you. Please direct any parcels to me to the care of Walter Auld, Saddler, Dumfries. When I grow richer, I will write to you on gilt-post, to make amends for this sheet. At present every guinea has a five guinea errand with, my dear Sir, your faithful, poor, but honest friend,

R. B.

(By Stuart, I mean the famous Stuart, who differed with the rest of the proprietors and set up by himself.)

TO MR. WILLIAM BURNS, SADDLER,

CARE OF MR. WRIGHT, CARRIER, LONGTOWN.

ISLE, 15th April, 1789.

MY DEAR WILLIAM,

I am extremely sorry at the misfortune of your legs; I beg you will never let any worldly concern interfere with the more serious matter, the safety of your life and limbs. I have not time in hurried days to write you anything than a mere how d'ye letter. I will only repeat my favourite quotation:—

> What proves the hero truly great,
> Is never, never to despair.

My house shall be your welcome; and as I know your prudence (would to God you had *resolution* equal to your *prudence!*) if, anywhere at a distance from friends, you should need money, you know my direction by post.

The enclosed is from Gilbert, brought by your sister Nanny. It was unluckily forgot. Yours to Gilbert goes by post. I have heard from them yesterday. They are all well. Adieu!

R. B.

TO MR. JAMES JOHNSON,

BELL'S WYND, EDINBURGH.

ELLISLAND, 24th April, 1789.

DEAR SIR,

My trunk was unaccountably delayed in Edinburgh, and did not reach me till about ten days ago; so I had not much time of your music. I have sent you a list that I approve of, but I beg and insist that you will never allow my opinion to overrule yours. I will write you more at large next post, as I, at present, have scarce time to subscribe myself, dear Sir, yours sincerely,

R. B.

TO MRS. M'MURDO, DRUMLANRIG.

ELLISLAND, 2d May, 1789.

MADAM,

I have finished the piece which had the happy fortune to be honoured with your approbation;[2] and never did little Miss with more sparkling pleasure show her applauded sampler to partial Mamma, than I now send my poem to you and Mr. M'Murdo, if he is returned to Drumlanrig. You cannot easily imagine what thin-skinned animals—what sensitive plants poor poets are. How do we shrink into the imbittered corner of self-abase-

[1] Why the poet wished this address, and why he cautioned secrecy will be seen in his next letter to Mrs. Dunlop.

[2] The name of this poem is uncertain.

ment, when neglected or condemned by those to whom we look up! and how do we, in erect importance, add another cubit to our stature on being noticed and applauded by those whom we honour and respect! My late visit to Drumlanrig has, I can tell you, Madam, given me a balloon waft up Parnassus, where on my fancied elevation I regard my poetic self with no small degree of complacency. Surely with all their sins, the rhyming tribe are not ungrateful creatures.—I recollect your goodness to your humble guest—I see Mr. M'Murdo adding to the politeness of the gentleman, the kindness of a friend, and my heart swells as it would burst, with warm emotions and ardent wishes! It may be it is not gratitude—it may be a mixed sensation. That strange, shifting, doubling animal MAN is so generally, at best, but a negative, often a worthless creature, that we cannot see real goodness and native worth without feeling the bosom glow with sympathetic approbation. With every sentiment of grateful respect, I have the honour to be, Madam, your obliged and grateful humble servant,

R. B.

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

ELLISLAND, 4th May, 1789.

You see, Madam, that I am returned to my folio epistles again. I no sooner hit on any poetic plan or fancy, but I wish to send it to you; and if knowing and reading these give half the pleasure to you, that communicating them to you gives to me, I am satisfied.

As I am not devoutly attached to a certain monarch, I cannot say my heart ran any risk of bursting on Thursday was se'ennight, with the struggling emotions of gratitude. God forgive me for speaking evil of dignities! But I must say that I look on the whole business as a solemn farce of pageant mummery. The following are a few stanzas of new psalmody for that "joyful solemnity," which I sent to a London newspaper, with the date and preface following:—

KILMARNOCK, 25th April.

MR. PRINTER,

In a certain chapel not fifty leagues from the market cross of this good town, the following stanzas of psalmody, it is said, were composed for, and devoutly sung on, the late joyful solemnity of the 23rd.

O sing a new song to the Lord, &c. &c.

(See vol. iii. p. 29.)

So much for Psalmody.—You must know that the publisher of one of the most blasphemous party London newspapers is an acquaintance of mine,[1] and as I am a little tinctured with Buff and Blue myself, I now and then help him to a stanza.

I have a poetic whim in my head, which I at present dedicate, or rather inscribe, to the Right Hon. Charles James Fox; but how long that fancy may hold, I cannot say. A few of the first lines I have just rough sketched as follows:—

How Wisdom and Folly meet, mix, and unite, &c.

(See vol. iii. p. 31.)

I beg your pardon for troubling you with the enclosed to the Major's tenant before the gate; it is to request him to look me out two milk cows, one for myself, and another for Captain Riddell of Glenriddell; a very obliging neighbour of mine. John very obligingly offered to do so for me, and I will either serve myself that way or at Mauchline fair. It happens on the 20th curt., and the Sunday preceding it, I hope to have the honour of assuring you in person how sincerely I am, Madam, Your highly obliged and most obedient humble servant,

R. B.

TO MR. ALEX. CUNNINGHAM.

ELLISLAND, 4th May, 1789.

MY DEAR SIR,

Your *duty-free* favour of the 26th April I received two days ago; I will not say I perused it with pleasure; that is the cold compliment of ceremony; I perused it, Sir, with delicious satisfaction;—in short, it is such a letter, that not you, nor your friend, but the legislature, by express proviso in their postage laws, should frank. A letter informed with the soul of friendship is such an honour to human nature, that they should order it free ingress and egress to and from their bags and mails, as an en-

[1] Peter Stuart, publisher of the *Star* newspaper.

courage and mark of distinction to super-eminent virtue.

I have just put the last hand to a little poem, which, I think, will be something to your taste:—One morning lately, as I was out pretty early in the fields, sowing some grass-seeds, I heard the burst of a shot from a neighbouring plantation, and presently a poor little wounded hare came crippling by me. You will guess my indignation at the inhuman fellow who could shoot a hare at this season, when all of them have young ones. Indeed, there is something in this business of destroying, for our sport, individuals in the animal creation that do not injure us materially, which I could never reconcile to my ideas of virtue.

Inhuman man! curse on thy barb'rous art, &c.

(See vol. iii. p. 32.)

Let me know how you like my poem. I am doubtful whether it would not be an improvement to keep out the last stanza but one altogether.

Cruickshank is a glorious production of the author of man. You, he, and the noble Colonel[1] of the Crochallan Fencibles are to me

Dear as the ruddy drops which warm my heart.[2]

I have got a good mind to make verses on you all, to the tune of "*Three guid fellows ayont the glen.*

R. B.

TO MR. WILLIAM BURNS,

SADDLER, NEWCASTLE-ON-TYNE.

ELLISLAND, 5th May, 1789.

MY DEAR WILLIAM,

I am happy to hear by yours from Newcastle, that you are getting some employ. Remember

On Reason build Resolve
That column of true majesty in man.

I had a visit of your old landlord. In the midst of a drunken frolic in Dumfries, he took it into his head to come and see me; and I took all the pains in my power to please and entertain the old veteran. He is high in your praises, and I would advise you to cultivate his friendship, as he is, in his way, a worthy, and to you may be, a useful man.

Anderson I hope will have your shoes ready to send by the waggon to-morrow. I forgot to mention the circumstance of making them pumps; but I suppose good calf shoes will be no mistake. Wattie has paid me for the thongs.

What would you think of making a little inquiry how husbandry matters go as you travel, and if one thing fail, you might try another!

Your falling in love is indeed a phenomenon. To a fellow of your turn it cannot be hurtful. I am, you know, an old veteran in these campaigns, so let me advise you always to pay your particular assiduities and try for intimacy as soon as you feel the first symptoms of the passion; this is not only the best, as making the most of the little entertainment which the sportabilities of distant addresses always give, but is the best preservative for one's peace. I need not caution you against guilty amours—they are bad and ruinous everywhere, but in England they are the very devil. I shall be in Ayrshire about a fortnight. Your sisters send their compliments. God bless you!

R. B.

TO ROBERT GRAHAM, ESQ.

ELLISLAND, 13th May, 1789.

SIR,

Though I intend making a little manuscript-book of my unpublished poems for Mrs. Graham, yet I cannot forbear in the meantime sending her the enclosed, which was the production of the other day.[3] In the plea of humanity, the ladies, to their honour be it spoken, are ever warmly interested. That is one reason of my troubling you with this; another motive I have is a hackneyed subject in my letters to you—God help a poor devil who carries about with him a load of gratitude of which he can never hope to ease his shoulders but at the expense of his heart! I waited on Collector Mitchell with your letter. It happened to be collection-

[1] William Dunbar, W.S.

[2] Gray's *Bard*, imitating Shakespeare:

As dear to me as are the ruddy drops
That visit my sad heart.—*Julius Cæsar*, ii. 1.

[3] The poem beginning:—

Inhuman man! curse on thy barb'rous art.

—See vol. iii. p. 32.

day, so he was very busy; but he received me with the utmost politeness, and made me promise to call on him soon. As I don't wish to degrade myself to a hungry rook, gasping for a morsel, I shall just give him a hint of my wishes. I am going on with a bold hand in my farm, and am certain of holding it with safety for three or four years; and, I think, if some cursed malevolent star have not taken irremovable possession of my zenith, that your patronage and my own priority then as an expectant, should run a fair chance for the division I want. By the bye, the Excise instructions you mentioned were not in the bundle;[1] but 'tis no matter; Marshall in his *Yorkshire*, and particularly that extraordinary man Smith, in his *Wealth of Nations* find my leisure employment enough. I could not have given any mere *man* credit for half the intelligence Mr. Smith discovers in his book. I would covet much to have his ideas respecting the present state of some quarters of the world that are, or have been, the scenes of considerable revolutions since his book was written. Though I take the advantage of your goodness, and presume to send you any new poetic thing of mine, I must not tax you with answers to each of my idle letters. I remember you talked of being this way with my honoured friend, Sir William Murray, in the course of this summer. You cannot imagine, Sir, how happy it would make me should you, too, illuminate my humble domicile. You will certainly do me the honour to partake of a farmer's dinner with me. I shall promise you a piece of good old beef, a chicken, or perhaps a Nith salmon fresh from the wear, and a glass of good punch, on the shortest notice; and allow me to say that Cincinnatus or Fabricius, who presided in the august Roman senate, and led their invincible armies, would have jumped at such a dinner. I expect your honours with a kind of enthusiasm, I shall mark the year, and mark the day, and hand it down to my children's children as one of the most distinguished honours of their ancestor.

I have the honour to be, with sincerest gratitude, your obliged and very humble servant,

R. B.

[1] This was a parcel of books, including the two mentioned in the same sentence, kindly sent on loan by the poet's correspondent.

TO RICHARD BROWN,

PORT GLASGOW.

MAUCHLINE, 21st May, 1789

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I was in the country by accident, and hearing of your safe arrival, I could not resist the temptation of wishing you joy on your return, —wishing you would write to me before you sail again,—wishing you would always set me down as your bosom friend,—wishing you long life and prosperity, and that every good thing may attend you,—wishing Mrs. Brown and your little ones as free of the evils of this world as is consistent with humanity,—wishing you and she were to make two at the ensuing lying-in, with which Mrs. B. threatens very soon to favour me,—wishing I had longer time to write to you at present; and, finally, wishing that if there is to be another state of existence, Mrs. Brown, Mrs. Burns, our little ones of both families, and you and I, in some snug retreat, may make a jovial party to all eternity!

My direction is at Ellisland, near Dumfries. Yours,

R. B.

TO MR. JAMES HAMILTON.[2]

ELLISLAND, 26th May, 1789.

DEAR SIR,

I send you by John Glover, carrier, the above account for Mr. Turnbull, as I suppose you know his address.

I would fain offer, my dear Sir, a word of sympathy with your misfortunes; but it is a tender string, and I know not how to touch it. It is easy to flourish a set of high-flown sentiments on the subjects that would give great satisfaction to—a breast quite at ease; but, as ONE observes who was very seldom mistaken in the theory of life, "The heart knoweth its own sorrows, and a stranger intermeddleth not therewith."

Among some distressful emergencies that I have experienced in life, I ever laid this down

[2] Hamilton was a grocer in Glasgow, and from the above letter would seem at the time to have been suffering under some heavy misfortunes in business.

as my foundation of comfort—*That he who has lived the life of an honest man, has by no means lived in vain!*

With every wish for your welfare and future success, I am, my dear Sir, sincerely yours,

R. B.

TO GAVIN HAMILTON.

[ELLISLAND, June 1789.]

MY DEAR SIR,

It is indeed with the highest pleasure that I congratulate you on the return of days of ease and nights of pleasure, after the horrid hours of misery in which I saw you suffering existence when last in Ayrshire; I seldom pray for anybody, "I'm baith dead-sweer and wretched ill o't;"[1] but most fervently do I beseech the Power that directs the world, that you may live long and be happy, but live no longer than you are happy. It is needless for me to advise you to have a reverend care of your health. I know you will make it a point never at one time to drink more than a pint of wine (I mean an English pint), and that you will never be witness to more than one bowl of punch at a time, and that cold drams you will never more taste; and, above all things, I am convinced, that after drinking perhaps boiling punch, you will never mount your horse and gallop home in a chill late hour. Above all things, as I understand you are in the habits of intimacy with that Boanerges of gospel powers, Father Auld,[2] be earnest with him that he will wrestle in prayer for you, that you may see the vanity of vanities in trusting to, or even practising the casual moral works of charity, humanity, generosity, and forgiveness of things, which you practised so flagrantly that it was evident you delighted in them, neglecting, or perhaps profanely despising, the wholesome doctrine of *faith without works*, the only author of salvation. A hymn of thanksgiving would, in my opinion, be highly becoming from you at present, and in my zeal for your well-being, I earnestly press on you to be diligent in chanting over the two inclosed pieces of sacred poesy.[3] My best compliments to Mrs. Hamilton and Miss Kennedy.—Yours, &c.

R. B.

[1] A quotation from his own "Dedication to Gavin Hamilton."

[2] A note in vol. ii. p. 143 will explain the introduction of "Father Auld's" name here.

TO MR. JOHN M'AULEY, WRITER, DUMBARTON.[4]

ELLISLAND, 4th June, 1789.

DEAR SIR,

Though I am not without my fears respecting my fate, at that grand, universal inquest of right and wrong, commonly called *The Last Day*, yet I trust there is one sin, which that arch-vagabond, Satan, who I understand is to be king's evidence, cannot throw in my teeth—I mean ingratitude. There is a certain pretty large quantum of kindness for which I remain, and, from inability, I fear must still remain, your debtor; but though unable to repay the debt, I assure you, Sir, I shall ever warmly remember the obligation. It gives me the sincerest pleasure to hear by my old acquaintance, Mr. Kennedy,[5] that you are, in immortal Allan's language, "Hale, and weel, and living;" and that your charming family are well, and promising to be an amiable and respectable addition to the company of performers, whom the Great Manager of the Drama of Man is bringing into action for the succeeding age.

With respect to my welfare, a subject in which you once warmly and effectively interested yourself, I am here in my old way, holding my plough, marking the growth of my corn, or the health of my dairy; and at times sauntering by the delightful windings of the Nith, on the margin of which I have built my humble domicile, praying for seasonable weather, or holding an intrigue with the Muses; the only gypsies with whom I have now any intercourse. As I am entered into

[3] "It is not difficult," Robert Chambers remarks in reference to this letter, "for one who has seen aught of the unpublished manuscripts of Burns, to imagine what sort of compositions he refers to as 'piece. of sacred poesy.'"

[4] This gentleman seems to have played the part of Burns's host while returning from his Inverary excursion. See pp. 63, 64.

[5] Probably the John Kennedy to whom the letter on p. 24 is addressed.

the holy state of matrimony, I trust my face is turned completely Zion-ward; and as it is a rule with all honest fellows to repeat no grievances, I hope that the little poetic licences of former days will of course fall under the oblivious influence of some good-natured statute of celestial prescription. In my family devotion, which, like a good presbyterian, I occasionally give to my household folks, I am extremely fond of the psalm, "Let not the errors of my youth," &c., and that other, "Lo, children are God's heritage," &c., in which last Mrs. Burns, who by the bye has a glorious "wood-note wild" at either old song or psalmody, joins me with the pathos of Handel's Messiah.

R. B.

TO MR. ROBERT AINSLIE.

ELLISLAND, 8th June, 1789.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I am perfectly ashamed of myself when I look at the date of your last. It is not that I forget the friend of my heart and the companion of my peregrinations; but I have been condemned to drudgery beyond sufferance, though not, thank God, beyond redemption. I have had a collection of poems by a lady put into my hands to prepare them for the press; which horrid task, with sowing corn with my own hand, a parcel of masons, wrights, plasterers, &c., to attend to, roaming on business through Ayrshire—all this was against me, and the very first dreadful article was of itself too much for me.

13th. I have not had a moment to spare from incessant toil since the 8th. Life, my dear Sir, is a serious matter. You know by experience that a man's individual self is a good deal, but believe me, a wife and family of children, whenever you have the honour to be a husband and a father, will show you that your present and most anxious hours of solitude are spent on trifles. The welfare of those who are very dear to us, whose only support, hope, and stay we are—this, to a generous mind, is another sort of more important object of care than any concerns whatever which centre merely in the individual. On the other hand, let no young, unmarried, rakehelly dog among you, make a song of his pretended liberty and freedom from care. If the relations we stand in to king, country, kindred, and friends, be any thing but the visionary fancies of dreaming metaphysicians; if religion, virtue, magnanimity, generosity, humanity and justice, be aught but empty sounds; then the man who may be said to live only for others, for the beloved, honourable female, whose tender faithful embrace endears life, and for the helpless little innocents who are to be the men and women, the worshippers of his God, the subjects of his king, and the support, nay the very vital existence of his COUNTRY, in the ensuing age;—compare such a man with any fellow whatever, who, whether he bustle and push in business among labourers, clerks, statesmen, or whether he roar and rant, and drink and sing in taverns—a fellow over whose grave no one will breathe a single heigh-ho, except from the cobweb-tie of what is called good fellowship—who has no view nor aim but what terminates in himself;—if there be any grovelling earth-born wretch of our species, a renegado to common sense, who would fain believe that the noble creature Man is no better than a sort of fungus, generated out of nothing, nobody knows how, and soon dissipating in nothing, nobody knows where; such a stupid beast, such a crawling reptile, might balance the foregoing unexaggerated comparison, but no one else would have the patience.

Forgive me, my dear Sir, for this long silence. *To make you amends*, I shall send you soon, and more encouraging still, without any postage, one or two rhymes of my later manufacture.

R. B.

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

ELLISLAND, 21st June, 1789.

DEAR MADAM,

Will you take the effusions, th miserable effusions of low spirits, just as they flow from their bitter springs? I know not of any particular cause for this worst of all my foes besetting me; but for some time my soul has been beclouded with a thickening atmosphere of evil imaginations and gloomy presages.

Monday Evening.

I have just heard Mr. Kirkpatrick[1] preach a sermon. He is a man famous for his benevolence, and I revere him; but from such ideas of my Creator, good Lord, deliver me! Religion, my honoured friend, is surely a simple business, as it equally concerns the ignorant and the learned, the poor and the rich. That there is an incomprehensible Great Being, to whom I owe my existence, and that he must be intimately acquainted with the operations and progress of the internal machinery, and consequent outward deportment of this creature which he has made; these are, I think, self-evident propositions. That there is a real and eternal distinction between virtue and vice, and consequently, that I am an accountable creature; that from the seeming nature of the human mind, as well as from the evident imperfection, nay, positive injustice, in the administration of affairs, both in the natural and moral worlds, there must be a retributive scene of existence beyond the grave; must, I think, be allowed by every one who will give himself a moment's reflection. I will go farther, and affirm, that from the sublimity, excellence, and purity of his doctrine and precepts, unparalleled by all the aggregated wisdom and learning of many preceding ages, though, to *appearance*, he himself was the obscurest and most illiterate of our species; therefore Jesus Christ was from God.

Whatever mitigates the woes, or increases the happiness of others, this is my criterion of goodness; and whatever injures society at large, or any individual in it, this is my measure of iniquity.

What think you, madam, of my creed? I trust that I have said nothing that will lessen me in the eye of one, whose good opinion I value almost next to the approbation of my own mind.

R. B.

[1] The minister of the parish of Dunscore, whose church Burns and his family attended during their residence at Ellisland. Mr. Kirkpatrick was a staunch Calvinist, and consequently between the poet and him there could be little sympathy.

TO HELEN MARIA WILLIAMS.

ELLISLAND, [July,] 1789.

MADAM,

Of the many problems in the nature of that wonderful creature, Man, this is one of the most extraordinary, that he shall go on from day to day, from week to week, from month to month, or perhaps from year to year, suffering a hundred times more in an hour from the impotent consciousness of neglecting what he ought to do, than the very doing of it would cost him. I am deeply indebted to you, first for a most elegant poetic compliment;[2] then for a polite, obliging letter; and, lastly, for your excellent poem on the Slave-Trade; and yet, wretch that I am! though the debts were debts of honour, and the creditor a lady, I have put off and put off even the very acknowledgment of the obligation, until you must indeed be the very angel I take you for, if you can forgive me.

Your poem I have read with the highest pleasure. I have a way whenever I read a book, I mean a book in our own trade, Madam, a poetic one, and when it is my own property, that I take a pencil and mark at the ends of verses, or note on margins and odd paper, little criticisms of approbation or disapprobation as I peruse along. I will make no apology for presenting you with a few unconnected thoughts that occurred to me in my repeated perusals of your poem. I want to show you that I have honesty enough to tell you what I take to be truths, even when they are not quite on the side of approbation; and I do it in the firm faith that you have equal greatness of mind to hear them with pleasure.

I know very little of scientific criticism, so all I can pretend to in that intricate art is merely to note, as I read along, what passages strike me as being uncommonly beautiful, and where the expression seems to be perplexed or faulty.

The poem opens finely. There are none of these idle prefatory lines which one may skip over before one comes to the subject. Verses 9th and 10th in particular,

> Where ocean's unseen bound
> Leaves a drear world of waters round,

[2] See note to letter addressed to Dr. Moore, on p. 49.

are truly beautiful. The simile of the hurricane is likewise fine; and, indeed, beautiful as the poem is, almost all the similes rise decidedly above it. From verse 31st to verse 50th is a pretty eulogy on Britain. Verse 36th, "That foul drama deep with wrong," is nobly expressive. Verse 46th, I am afraid, is rather unworthy of the rest, "to dare to feel" is an idea that I do not altogether like. The contrast of valour and mercy, from the 46th verse to the 50th, is admirable.

Either my apprehension is dull, or there is something a little confused in the apostrophe to Mr. Pitt. Verse 55th is the antecedent to verses 57th and 58th, but in verse 58th the connection seems ungrammatical:—

> Powers . . . . . .
> With no gradations mark'd their flight,
> But rose at once to glory's height.

"Ris'n" should be the word instead of "rose." Try it in prose. Powers,—their flight marked by no gradations, but (the same powers) risen at once to the height of glory. Likewise, verse 53d, "For this," is evidently meant to lead on the sense of the verses 59th, 60th, 61st, and 62d: but let us try how the thread of connection runs:—

> For this . . . . . .
> The deeds of mercy, that embrace
> A distant sphere, an alien race,
> Shall virtue's lips record, and claim
> The fairest honours of thy name.

I beg pardon if I misapprehend the matter, but this appears to me the only imperfect passage in the poem. The comparison of the sun-beam is fine.

The compliment to the Duke of Richmond is, I hope, as just as it is certainly elegant. The thought,

> Virtue . . . . . .
> Sends from her unsullied source,
> The gems of thought their purest force,

is exceedingly beautiful. The idea, from verse 81st to the 85th, that the "blest decree" is like the beams of morning ushering in the glorious day of liberty, ought not to pass unnoticed or unapplauded. From verse 85th to verse 108th is an animated contrast between the unfeeling selfishness of the oppressor on the one hand and the misery of the captive on the other. Verse 88th might perhaps be amended thus: "Nor ever *quit* her narrow maze." We are said to *pass* a bound, but we *quit* a maze. Verse 100th is exquisitely beautiful:—

> They, whom wasted blessings tire.

Verse 110th is I doubt a clashing of metaphors: "to load a span," is, I am afraid, an unwarrantable expression. In verse 114th, "Cast the universe in shade," is a fine idea. From the 115th verse to the 142d is a striking description of the wrongs of the poor African. Verse 120th, "The load of unremitted pain," is a remarkable, strong expression. The address to the advocates for abolishing the slave-trade, from verse 143d to verse 208th, is animated with the true life of genius. The picture of oppression,—

> While she links her impious chain,
> And calculates the price of pain;
> Weighs agony in sordid scales,
> And marks if death or life prevails,—

is nobly executed.

What a tender idea is in verse 180th! Indeed that whole description of home may vie with Thomson's description of home, somewhere in the beginning of his Autumn. I do not remember to have seen a stronger expression of misery than is contained in these verses:

> Condemned, severe extreme, to live
> When all is fled that life can give.

The comparison of our distant joys to distant objects is equally original and striking.

The character and manners of the dealer in the infernal traffic is a well done, though a horrid picture. I am not sure how far introducing the sailor was right; for though the sailor's common characteristic is generosity, yet, in this case, he is not only an unconcerned witness, but, in some degree, an efficient agent in the business. Verse 224th is a nervous . . . expressive—"The heart convulsive anguish breaks." The description of the captive wretch when he arrives in the West Indies, is carried on with equal spirit. The thought that the oppressor's sorrow on seeing the slave pine, is like the butcher's regret when his destined lamb dies a natural death, is exceedingly fine.

I am got so much into the cant of criticism,

that I begin to be afraid lest I have nothing except the cant of it; and instead of elucidating my author, I am only benighting myself. For this reason, I will not pretend to go through the whole poem. Some few remaining beautiful lines, however, I cannot pass over. Verse 280th is the strongest description of selfishness I ever saw. The comparison in verses 285th and 286th is new and fine; and the line, "Your arms to penury you lend," is excellent.

In verse 317th, "like" should certainly be "as" or "so;" for instance—

> His sway the hardened bosom leads
> To cruelty's remorseless deeds:
> As (or, so) the blue lightning, when it springs
> With fury on its livid wings,
> Darts on the goal with rapid force,
> Nor heeds that ruin marks its course.

If you insert the word "like" where I have placed "as," you must alter "darts" to "darting," and "heeds" to "heeding," in order to make it grammar. A tempest is a favourite subject with the poets, but I do not remember anything, even in Thomson's "Winter," superior to your verses from the 347th to the 351st. Indeed, the last simile, beginning with "Fancy may dress," &c., and ending with the 350th verse, is, in my opinion, the most beautiful passage in the poem; it would do honour to the greatest names that ever graced our profession.

I will not beg your pardon, Madam, for these strictures, as my conscience tells me, that for once in my life I have acted up to the duties of a Christian, in doing as I would be done by.

I had lately the honour of a letter from Dr. Moore, where he tells me that he has sent me some books; they are not yet come to hand, but I hear they are on the way.

Wishing you all success in your progress in the path of fame; and that you may equally escape the danger of stumbling through incautious speed, or losing ground through loitering neglect, I am, &c.[1]

R. B.

[1] The following was the reply of Miss Williams to the above letter.

"7th August, 1789.

"Dear Sir,

"I do not lose a moment in returning you my sincere acknowledgments for your letter, and your criticism on my poem, which is a very flattering proof that you have read it with attention. I think your objections are perfectly just, except in one instance.

"You have indeed been very profuse of panegyric on my little performance. A much less portion of applause from *you*, would have been gratifying to me; since I think its value depends entirely upon the source from whence it proceeds—the incense of praise, like other incense, is more grateful from the quality, than the quantity of the odour.

"I hope you still cultivate the pleasures of poetry, which are precious even independent of the rewards of fame. Perhaps the most valuable property of poetry is its power of disengaging the mind from worldly cares, and leading the imagination to the richest springs of intellectual enjoyment; since, however frequently life may be chequered with gloomy scenes, those who truly love the Muse, can always find one little path adorned with flowers and cheered by sunshine."

TO ROBERT GRAHAM, ESQ., OF FINTRY.

Ellisland, 31st July, 1789.

Sir,

The language of gratitude has been so prostituted by servile adulation and designing flattery, that I know not how to express myself when I would acknowledge the receipt of your last letter. I beg and hope, ever-honoured

> Friend of my life! *true patron of my rhymes,*

that you will always give me credit for the sincerest, chastest gratitude! The callous hypocrite may be louder than I in his grateful professions—professions which he never felt; or the selfish heart of the covetous may pocket the bounties of beneficence with more rejoicing exultation; but for the brimful eye, springing from the ardent throbbings of an honest bosom at the goodness of a kindly active benefactor and politely generous friend, I dare call the Searcher of hearts and Author of all goodness to witness how truly these are mine to you.

Mr. Mitchell did not wait my calling on him, but sent me a kind letter, giving me a hint of the business, and on my waiting on him yesterday, he entered with the most friendly ardour into my views and interests. He seems to think, and from my own private knowledge I am certain he is right, that removing the officer who now does, and for these many years has done, duty in the division in the middle of which I live, will be productive of at least no disadvantage to the revenue, and may likewise be done without any detriment to him.

Should the Honourable Board think so, and should they deem it eligible to appoint me to officiate in his present place, I am then at the top of my wishes. The emoluments of my office will enable me to carry on and enjoy these improvements in my farm, which, but for this additional assistance, I might in a year or two have abandoned. Should it be judged improper to place me in this division, I am deliberating whether I had not better give up my farming altogether, and go into the Excise whenever I can find employment. Now that the salary is £50 per annum, the Excise is surely a much superior object to a farm, which, without some foreign assistance, must, for half a lease, be a losing bargain. The worst of it is, I know there are some respectable characters who do me the honour to interest themselves in my welfare and behaviour, and as leaving the farm so soon may have an unsteady, giddy-headed appearance, I had perhaps better lose a little money than hazard such people's esteem.

You see, Sir, with what freedom I lay before you all my little matters—little indeed to the world, but of the most important magnitude to me. You are so good, that I trust I am not troublesome. I have heard and read a good deal about philanthropy, benevolence, and greatness of soul, and when rounded with the flourish of declamatory periods, or poured in the mellifluence of Parnassian measure, they have a tolerable effect on a musical ear; but when these high-sounding professions are compared with the very act and deed as it is usually performed, I do not think there is any thing in or belonging to human nature so baldly disproportionate. In fact, were it not for a very few of our kind (among whom an honoured friend of mine, that to you, Sir, I will not name, is a distinguished instance) the very existence of magnanimity, generosity, and all their kindred virtues, would be as much a question with metaphysicians as the existence of witchcraft. Perhaps the nature of man is not so much to blame for all this, as the situation in which, by some miscarriage or other, he is placed in this world. The poor, naked, helpless wretch, with such voracious appetites and such a famine of provision for them, is under a cursed necessity of turning selfish in his own defence. Except here and there a *scélérat* who seems to be a scoundrel from the womb of original Sin, thorough-paced selfishness is always the work of time. Indeed, in a little time, we generally grow so attentive to ourselves, and so regardless of others, that I have often in poetic frenzy looked on this world as one vast ocean, occupied and commoved by innumerable vortices, each whirling round its centre, which vortices are the children of men; and that the great design and merit, if I may say so, of every particular vortex consists in how wide it can extend the influence of its circle, and how much floating trash it can suck in and absorb.

I know not why I have got into this preaching vein, except it be to show you, Sir, that it is not my ignorance, but my knowledge of mankind which makes me so much admire your goodness to your humble servant.

I hope this will find my amiable young acquaintance John recovered from his indisposition, and all the members of your charming fireside circle well and happy. I am sure I am anxiously interested in all your welfares; I wish it with all my soul; nay I believe I sometimes catch myself praying for it. I am not impatient of my own impotence under that immense debt which I owe to your goodness, but I wish and beseech that BEING who has all good things in His hands, to bless and reward you with all those comforts and pleasures which He knows I would bestow on you were they mine to give.

I shall return your books very soon. I only wish to give Dr. Smith one other perusal, which I will do in two or three days. I do not think I must trouble you for another cargo, at least for some time, as I am going to apply to Leadbetter and Symons on Ganging, and to study my sliding rule, &c., with all possible attention.

An apology for the impertinent length of this epistle would only add to the evil.—I have the honour to be, Sir, your deeply indebted, humble servant.

R. B.

TO MR. DAVID SILLAR, MERCHANT, IRVINE.[1]

ELLISLAND, NEAR DUMFRIES, 5th Aug. 1789.

MY DEAR SIR,

I was half in thoughts not to have written to you at all, by way of revenge for the two d——d business letters you sent me. I wanted to know all and about your publication—what were your views, your hopes, fears, &c., in commencing poet in print. In short, I wanted you to write to *Robin* like his old acquaintance *Davie;* and not in the style of Mr. Tare to Mr. Tret.—"Mr. Tret.—Sir, This comes to advise you that fifteen barrels of herrings were, by the blessing of God, shipped safe on board the 'Lovely Janet,' Q.D.C., Duncan M'Leerie, master, &c., &c."

I hear you have commenced married man—so much the better for it. I know not whether the Nine Gypsies are jealous of my Lucky; but they are a good deal shyer since I could boast the important relation of husband.

I have got, I think, about eleven subscribers for your book. When you send to Mr. Auld, in Dumfries, his copies, you may with them pack me eleven; should I need more I can write you; should they be too many they can be returned. My best compliments to Mrs. Sillar, and believe me to be, dear David, ever yours,

R. B.

TO ——[2]

[ELLISLAND, August, 1789.]

DEAR SIR,

Whether in the way of my trade, I can be of any service to the Rev. Doctor, is I fear very doubtful. Ajax's shield consisted, I think, of seven bulls' hides and a plate of brass, which altogether set Hector's utmost force at defiance. Alas! I am not a Hector, and the worthy Doctor's foes are as securely armed as Ajax was. Ignorance, superstition, bigotry, stupidity, malevolence, self-conceit, envy—all strongly bound in a massy frame of brazen impudence. Good God, Sir! to such a shield, humour is the peck of a sparrow, and satire the pop-gun of a school-boy. Creation-disgracing scelerats such as they, God only can mend, and the devil only can punish. In the comprehending way of Caligula, I wish they all had but one neck. I feel impotent as a child to the ardour of my wishes! O for a withering curse to blast the germins of their wicked machinations. O for a poisonous tornado, winged from the torrid zone of Tartarus, to sweep the spreading crop of their villanous contrivances to the lowest hell!

R. B.

TO MR. JOHN LOGAN.[3]

ELLISLAND, NEAR DUMFRIES, 7th Aug. 1789.

DEAR SIR,

I intended to have written you long ere now, and, as I told you, I had gotten three stanzas and a half on my way in a poetic epistle to you; but that old enemy of all *good works*, the devil, threw me into a prosaic mire, and for the soul of me I cannot get out of it. I dare not write you a long letter, as I am going to intrude on your time with a long ballad. I have, as you will shortly see, finished the "Kirk's Alarm;"[4] but now that it is done, and that I have laughed once or twice at the conceits in some of the stanzas, I am determined not to let it get into the public; so I send you this copy, the first I have sent to Ayrshire (except some few of the stanzas which I wrote off in embryo for Gavin Hamilton), under the express provision and request, that you will only read it to *a few of us*, and do not on any account give, or permit to be taken, any copy of the ballad. If I could be of any service to Dr. M'Gill, I would do it, though it should be at a much greater expense than irritating a few bigoted priests, but I am afraid serving him in his present *embarras* is a task too hard for me. I have enemies enow, God knows, though I do not wantonly add to the number. Still, as I think there is some merit in two

[1] See note to the "Epistle to Davie," vol. i. p. 239.

[2] This letter, which has neither date nor address, was probably written to Robert Aiken, the legal defender of the Rev. William M'Gill (the Rev. Doctor alluded to in the letter) in the church courts. See "The Kirk's Alarm," vol. iii. p. 45.

[3] Of Knockshinnoch in the parish of New Cumnock, Ayrshire. The lairdship of Knockshinnoch is now in other hands, and the family of Logan extinct.

[4] See note at p. 45, vol. iii.

or three of the thoughts, I send it to you as a small, but sincere testimony how much, and with what respectful esteem, I am, dear Sir, your obliged humble servant,

R. B.

TO MR. WILLIAM BURNS, SADDLER, NEWCASTLE-ON-TYNE.

ELLISLAND, 14th August, 1789.

MY DEAR WILLIAM,

I received your letter, and am very happy to hear that you have got settled for the winter. I enclose you the two guinea-notes of the Bank of Scotland, which I hope will serve your need. It is indeed not quite so convenient for me to spare money as it once was, but I know your situation, and, I will say it, in some respects your worth. I have no time to write at present, but I beg you will endeavour to pluck up a *little* more of the Man than you used to have. Remember my favourite quotation:—

On reason build resolve,
That column of true majesty in man.

What proves the Hero truly great
Is never, never to despair.

Your mother and sisters desire your compliments. *A Dieu je vous commende,*

R. B.

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

ELLISLAND, 6th Sept. 1789.

DEAR MADAM,

I have mentioned in my last, my appointment to the Excise, and the birth of little Frank; who, by the bye, I trust will be no discredit to the honourable name of Wallace, as he has a fine manly countenance, and a figure that might do credit to a little fellow two months older; and likewise an excellent good temper, though when he pleases he has a pipe, only not quite so loud as the horn that his immortal namesake blew as a signal to take out the pin of Stirling Bridge.

I had some time ago an epistle, part poetic, and part prosaic, from your poetess, Mrs. J. Little,[1] a very ingenious, but modest composition. I should have writen her as she requested, but for the hurry of this new business.

The Ayrshire Contemporaries of Burns, published at Edinburgh in 1840. From that work we take the following particulars.

Janet Little was born near Ecclefechan, in Dumfries-shire, in 1759, the year of Burns's birth. Her parents were not in circumstances to afford her more than a common education; but she was early distinguished for her superior capacity and love of reading. Having entered into service she was taken into the employ of Mrs. Dunlop of Dunlop, the patroness of Burns. From Dunlop House she went to Loudoun Castle, where she took charge as superintendent of the dairy; hence her cognomen of "the Scottish milkmaid."

Janet had early become a votary of the muse; but there can be no doubt that the fame of Burns, of whom she heard so much at Dunlop House, tended greatly to fan the flame of her desire for poetic distinction. She greatly admired the poems of Burns, and not having had the pleasure of seeing him, she ventured on opening a correspondence by the following epistle:—

"LOUDOUN HOUSE, 12th July, 1789.

"SIR,

"Though I have not the happiness of being personally acquainted with you, yet amongst the number of those who have read and admired your publications, I may be permitted to trouble you with this. You must know, Sir, I am somewhat in love with the Muses, though I cannot boast of any favours they have deigned to confer upon me as yet; my situation in life has been very much against me as to that. I have spent some years in and about Ecclefechan (where my parents reside) in the station of a servant, and am now come to Loudoun House, at present possessed by Mrs. Hendrie: she is daughter to Mrs. Dunlop of Dunlop, whom I understand you are particularly acquainted with. As I had the pleasure of perusing your poems, I felt a partiality for the author, which I should not have experienced had you been in a more dignified station. I wrote a few verses of address to you, which I did not then think of ever presenting; but as fortune seems to have favoured me in this, by bringing me into a family by whom you are well known and much esteemed, and where perhaps I may have an opportunity of seeing you, I shall, in hopes of your future friendship, take the liberty to transcribe them.

Fair fa' the honest rustic swain,
The pride o' a' our Scottish plain:
Thou gies us joy to hear thy strain,
And notes sae sweet:
Old Ramsay's shade revived again
In thee we greet.

Loved Thalia, that delighted muse,
Seem'd lang shut up as a recluse;
To all she did her aid refuse
Since Allan's day,
Till Burns arose, then did she choose
To grace his lay.

[1] Of Janet Little, or, as she was poetically called, "The Scottish Milkmaid," a full account is given in

I have heard of her and her compositions in this country; and I am happy to add, always to the honour of her character. The fact is, I know not well how to write to her: I should

To hear thy sang all ranks desire,
Sae weel you strike the dormant lyre;
Apollo with poetic fire
Thy breast does warm,
And critics silently admire
Thy art to charm.

Cæsar and Luath weel can speak,
'Tis pity e'er their gabs should steek, shut
But into human nature keek, peep
And knots unravel:
To hear their lectures once a-week,
Nine miles I'd travel.

Thy dedication to G. H.
An' unco bonnie hamespun speech, very
Wi' winsome glee the heart can teach
A better lesson,
Than servile bards who fawn and fleech beg
Like beggar's messan. dog

When slighted love becomes your theme,
And woman's faithless vows you blame,
With so much pathos you exclaim,
In your Lament;
But glanced by the most rigid dame,
She would relent.

The daisy, too, ye sing wi' skill,
And weel ye praise the whiskey gill:
In vain I blunt my feckless quill
Your fame to raise;
While Echo sounds from ilka hill every
To Burns's praise.

Did Addison or Pope but hear,
Or Sam, that critic most severe,
A ploughboy sing with throat sae clear,
They in a rage
Their works would a' in pieces tear,
And curse your page.

Sure Milton's eloquence were faint
The beauties of your verse to paint:
My rude unpolish'd strokes but taint
Their brilliancy;
Th' attempt would doubtless vex a saint
And weel may be.

The task I'll drop—with heart sincere
To Heaven present my humble pray'r,
That all the blessings mortals share
May be by turns
Dispensed by an indulgent care,
To Robert Burns.

"Sir,—I hope you will pardon my boldness in this: my hand trembles while I write to you conscious of my unworthiness of what I would most earnestly solicit, viz. your favour and friendship; yet, hoping you will show yourself possessed of as much generosity and good nature as will prevent your exposing what sit down to a sheet of paper that I knew not how to stain. I am no dab at fine-drawn letter-writing; and, except when prompted by friendship or gratitude, or, which happens extremely rarely, inspired by the Muse (I know not her name) that presides over epistolary writing, I sit down, when necessitated to write, as I would sit down to beat hemp.

Some parts of your letter of the 20th August, struck me with the most melancholy concern for the state of your mind at present.

Would I could write you a letter of comfort, I would sit down to it with as much pleasure as I would to write an epic poem of my own composition that should equal the *Iliad*. Religion, my dear friend, is the true comfort! A strong persuasion in a future state of existence; a proposition so obviously probable, that, setting revelation aside, every nation and people, so far as investigation has reached, for at least

may justly be found liable to censure in this measure, I shall take the liberty to subscribe myself,

Sir, your most obedient humble servant,

"JANET LITTLE.

"P.S.—If you would condescend to honour me with a few lines from your hand, I would take it as a particular favour; and direct to me at Loudoun House, near Galston."

It is more than probable that Burns replied in terms complimentary to the poetess; for not long after, Janet undertook a journey to Dumfries-shire, partly to see her relatives, but chiefly for the purpose of obtaining a personal interview with the author of the "Mountain Daisy," at his farm of Ellisland. Burns was away on one of his excise excursions when Janet arrived; but she had not been long waiting his return when he was announced with the unpleasant intelligence that his horse had fallen, and the poet's arm was broken. Janet gave vent to her feelings on the occasion by recording the occurrence in a set of rather lame verses.

Flattered by the encouragement of her friends, and the local fame acquired by her stray productions, the Loudoun milkmaid was at length induced to think of submitting her works to the public. Prospectuses were accordingly printed, and she had the gratification of finding the subscription lists speedily swelled by many of the most illustrious and respectable names, not only in the district, but throughout the country generally. Thus patronized, *The Poetical Works of Janet Little, the Scottish Milkmaid*, appeared in 1792, from the press of John and Peter Wilson of Ayr, in a thin 8vo volume. Many of her pieces are not destitute of merit, while all bear evidence of a cultivated, well-regulated mind. She subsequently became the wife of John Richmond, a labourer at Loudoun Castle, and died in 1813. In figure Janet greatly belied her name; for she was a very tall masculine woman.

near four thousand years, have, in some mode or other, firmly believed it. In vain would we reason and pretend to doubt. I have myself done so to a very daring pitch; but, when I reflected that I was opposing the most ardent wishes, and the most darling hopes of good men, and flying in the face of all human belief, in all ages, I was shocked at my own conduct.

I know not whether I have ever sent you the following lines, or if you have ever seen them; but it is one of my favourite quotations, which I keep constantly by me in my progress through life, in the language of the book of Job.

Against the day of battle and of war—

spoken of religion:

'Tis *this*, my friend, that streaks our morning bright,
'Tis *this* that gilds the horror of our night,
When wealth forsakes us, and when friends are few,
When friends are faithless, or when foes pursue;
'Tis this that wards the blow, or stills the smart,
Disarms affliction, or repels his dart;
Within the breast bids purest raptures rise,
Bids smiling conscience spread her cloudless skies.

I have been busy with *Zeluco*.[1] The Doctor is so obliging as to request my opinion of it; and I have been revolving in my mind some kind of criticisms on novel-writing, but it is a depth beyond my research. I shall, however, digest my thoughts on the subject as well as I can. *Zeluco* is a most sterling performance.

Farewell! *A Dieu, le bon Dieu, je vous commende!*

R. B.

TO MR. PETER STUART, LONDON.

[September,] 1789.

MY DEAR SIR,

The hurry of a farmer in this particular season, and the indolence of a poet at all times and seasons, will, I hope, plead my excuse for neglecting so long to answer your obliging letter of the fifth of August.

That you have done well in quitting your laborious concern in . . . I do not doubt; the weighty reasons you mention, were, I hope very, and deservedly indeed, weighty ones, and your health is a matter of the last importance; but whether the remaining proprietors of the paper have also done well, is what I much doubt. The [*Star*], so far as I was a reader, exhibited such a brilliancy of point, such an elegance of paragraph, and such a variety of intelligence, that I can hardly conceive it possible to continue a daily paper in the same degree of excellence: but if there was a man who had abilities equal to the task, that man's assistance the proprietors have lost.

When I received your letter I was transcribing for . . . my letter to the magistrates of the Canongate, Edinburgh, begging their permission to place a tomb-stone over poor Fergusson, and their edict in consequence of my petition, but now I shall send them to——.[2] Poor Fergusson! If there be a life beyond the grave, which I trust there is; and if there be a good God presiding over all nature, which I am sure there is; thou art enjoying existence in a glorious world, where worth of the heart alone is distinction in the man; where riches, deprived of all their pleasure-purchasing powers, return to their native sordid matter; where titles and honours are the disregarded reveries of an idle dream; and where that heavy virtue, which is the negative consequence of steady dulness, and those thoughtless, though often destructive follies, which are the unavoidable aberrations of frail human nature, will be thrown into equal oblivion as if they had never been!

Adieu, my dear Sir! So soon as your present views and schemes are concentered in an

[1] *Zeluco* was a novel by Dr. Moore, published in June, 1789. The first volume of Burns's copy with pencilled marginal notes in his handwriting is still in the possession of the representatives of Mrs. Dunlop.

[2] The *Scots Magazine* for August, 1789, contains a notice of the erection in the Canongate kirkyard of the tombstone provided by Burns, executed about two years and a half after it had been ordered. Burns's lettter to the Canongate authorities will be found at p. 50. Burns wrote a poetical inscription for the tombstone, which will be found at p. 201, vol. ii. In connection with the same subject Burns had written a letter to his present correspondent. (See p. 52.) Mr. Stuart had known poor Fergusson intimately. In his letter, to which this was an answer, he had said, "I cannot express my happiness sufficiently at the instance of your attachment to my late inestimable friend, Bob Fergusson, who was particularly intimate with myself and relations. While I recollect with pleasure his extraordinary talents and many amiable qualities, it affords me the

aim, I shall be glad to hear from you; as your welfare and happiness is by no means a subject indifferent to yours,

R. B.

TO CAPTAIN RIDDELL,

FRIARS' CARSE.

ELLISLAND, 16th Oct. 1789.

SIR,

Big with the idea of this important day at Friars' Carse,[1] I have watched the elements and skies in the full persuasion that they would announce it to the astonished world by some phenomena of terrific portent.—Yesternight until a very late hour did I wait with anxious horror for the appearance of some comet firing half the sky; or aerial armies of sanguinary Scandinavians, darting athwart the startled heavens, rapid as the ragged lightning and horrid as those convulsions of nature that bury nations.

The elements, however, seemed to take the matter very quietly: they did not even usher in this morning with triple suns and a shower of blood, symbolical of the three potent heroes, and the mighty claret-shed of the day.—For me, as Thomson in his "Winter" says of the storm—I shall "Hear astonished, and astonished sing"

> The whistle and the man; I sing
> The man that won the whistle, &c.
>
> Here are we met, three merry boys,
> Three merry boys I trow are we:
> And mony a night we've merry been,
> And mony mae we hope to be.
>
> Wha first shall rise to gang awa,
> A cuckold coward loon is he:
> Wha *last* beside his chair shall fa'
> He is the king amang us three.

To leave the heights of Parnassus, and come to the humble vale of prose.—I have some misgivings that I take too much upon me, when I request you to get your guest, Sir Robert Lawrie, to frank the two inclosed covers for me, the one of them to Sir Wm. Cunningham, of Robertland, Bart., at Auchenskeith, Kilmarnock,—the other to Mr. Allan Masterton, Writing-Master, Edinburgh. The first has a kindred claim on Sir Robert, as being a brother Baronet, and likewise a keen Foxite; the other is one of the worthiest men in the world, and a man of real genius; so, allow me to say, he has a fraternal claim on you. I want them franked for to-morrow, as I cannot get them to the post to-night. I shall send a servant again for them in the evening. Wishing that your head may be crowned with laurels to-night, and free from aches to-morrow, I have the honour to be, Sir, your deeply indebted humble servant,

R. B.

TO MR. ROBERT AINSLIE.

ELLISLAND, 1st Nov. 1789.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I had written you long ere now, could I have guessed where to find you, for I am sure you have more good sense than to waste the precious days of vacation time in the dirt of business in Edinburgh.—Wherever you are, God bless you, and lead you not into temptation, but deliver you from evil!

I do not know if I have informed you that I am now appointed to an Excise division, in the middle of which my house and farm lie. In this I was extremely lucky. Without ever having been an expectant, as they call their journeymen excisemen, I was directly planted

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greatest consolation that I am honoured with the correspondence of his successor in national simplicity and genius."

[1] This alludes to the contest for "The Whistle." See the poem and note at p. 53, vol. iii. As we have not elsewhere given the reader any special information in regard to Friars' Carse, the hospitable mansion where Burns was such a frequent guest while at Ellisland, we shall here furnish a few particulars in regard to the place. The mansion, which belongs to an estate of the same name, stands on a *carse* or holm on the right bank of the Nith in Dunscore parish, Dumfriesshire, six and a half miles from Dumfries, and about a mile from Ellisland. It received its name of "Friars" from being built on the site of an old building which was a cell, or dependency, of Melrose Abbey in pre-Reformation times. Subsequent to Mr. Riddell's death it came into the possession of Dr. James Crichton, and it now belongs to the Crichton Institution near Dumfries, a lunatic asylum for well-to-do patients, established on the funds left by this gentleman for charitable purposes. It was at the Carse that Burns met the renowned Grose, whom he has celebrated in more than one of his pieces, and for whom he wrote "Tam o' Shanter." The room which was the scene of the "Whistle" contest is naturally regarded with great interest by visitors. The Hermitage, in which Burns wrote a well-known poem, is now a ruin.

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R. B.

SSLIE.

st Nov. 1789.

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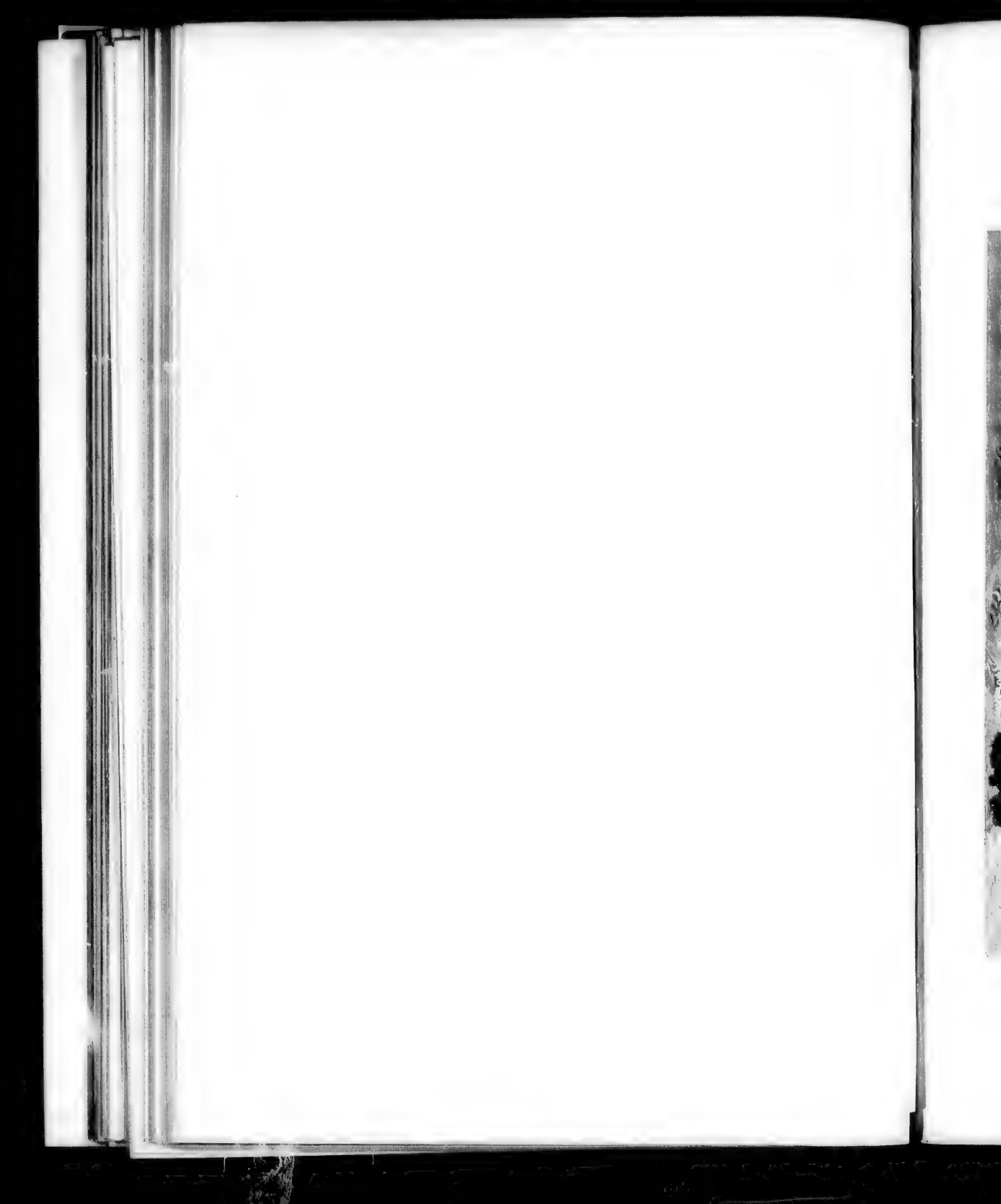


down to all intents and purposes an officer of Excise; there to flourish and bring forth fruits — worthy of repentance.

I know not how the word *excisemun*, or still more opprobrious, *gauger*, will sound in your ears. I too have seen the day when my auditory nerves would have felt very delicately on this subject; but a wife and children are things which have a wonderful power in blunting these kind of sensations. Fifty pounds a year for life, and a provision for widows and orphans, you will allow is no bad settlement for a *poet*. For the ignominy of the profession, I have the encouragement which I once heard a recruiting serjeant give to a numerous, if not a respectable audience, in the streets of Kilmarnock.—"Gentlemen, for your further and better encouragement, I can assure you that our regiment is the most blackguard corps under the crown, and consequently with us an honest fellow has the surest chance for preferment."

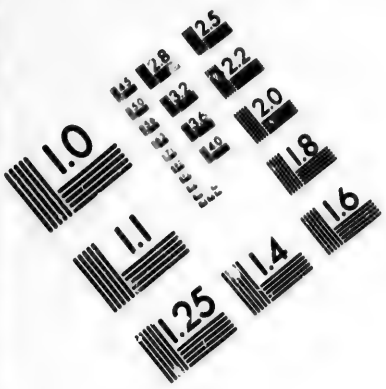
You need not doubt that I find several very unpleasant and disagreeable circumstances in my business; but I am tired with and disgusted at the language of complaint against the evils of life. Human existence in the most favourable situations does not abound with pleasures, and has its inconveniences and ills; capricious foolish man mistakes these inconveniences and ills as if they were the peculiar property of his particular situation; and hence that eternal fickleness, that love of change, which has ruined, and daily does ruin many a fine fellow, as well as many a blockhead, and is almost, without exception, a constant source of disappointment and misery. So far from being dissatisfied with my present lot, I earnestly pray the Great Disposer of events that it may never be worse, and I think I can lay my hand on my heart and say, "I shall be content."

I long to hear from you how you go on—not so much in business as in life. Are you pretty well satisfied with your own exertions, and tolerably at ease in your internal reflections? 'Tis much to be a great character as a lawyer, but beyond comparison more to be a great character as a man. That you may be both the one and the other is the earnest wish, and that you *will* be both is the firm persuasion of, my dear Sir, &c. R. B.

TO MR. RICHARD BROWN.

ELLISLAND, 4th November, 1789.

I have been so hurried, my ever dear friend, that though I got both your letters, I have not been able to command an hour to answer them as I wished; and even now, you are to look on this as merely confessing debt, and craving days. Few things could have given me so much pleasure as the news that you were once more safe and sound on terra firma, and happy in that place where happiness is alone to be found, in the fireside circle. May the benevolent Director of all things peculiarly bless you in all those endearing connections consequent on the tender and venerable names of husband and father! I have indeed been extremely lucky in getting an additional income of £50 a-year, while, at the same time, the appointment will not cost me above £10 or £12 per annum of expenses more than I must have inevitably incurred. The worst circumstance is, that the Excise division which I have got is so extensive, no less than ten parishes to ride over; and it abounds besides with so much business, that I can scarcely steal a spare moment. However, labour endears rest, and both together are absolutely necessary for the proper enjoyment of human existence. I cannot meet you any where. No less than an order from the board of Excise, at Edinburgh, is necessary before I can have so much time as to meet you in Ayrshire. But do you come, and see me. We must have a social day, and perhaps lengthen it out with half the night, before you go again to sea. You are the earliest friend I now have on earth, my brothers excepted; and is not that an endearing circumstance? When you and I first met, we were at the green period of human life. The twig would easily take a bent, but would as easily return to its former state. You and I not only took a mutual bent, but, by the melancholy, though strong influence of being both of the family of the unfortunate, we were entwined with one another in our growth towards advanced age; and blasted be the sacrilegious hand that shall attempt to undo the union! You and I must have one bumper to my favourite toast, "May the companions of our youth be the friends of



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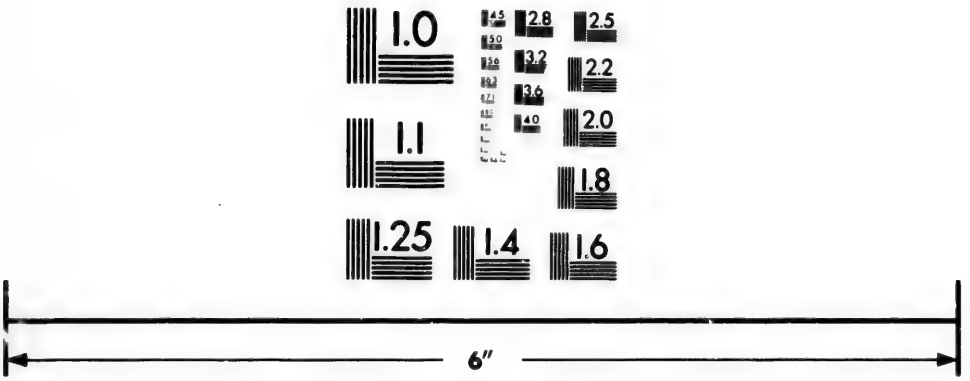

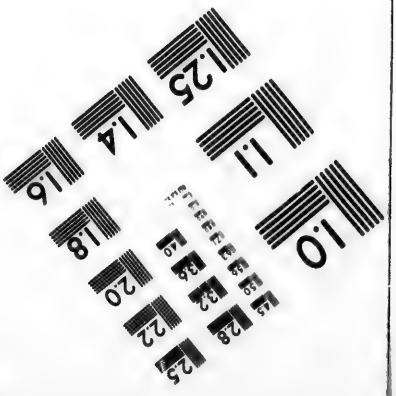

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our old age!" Come and see me one year; I shall see you at Port-Glasgow the next, and if we can contrive to have a gossiping between our two bed-fellows, it will be so much additional pleasure. Mrs. Burns joins me in kind compliments to you and Mrs. Brown. Adieu! I am ever, my dear Sir, yours,

R. B.

TO MR. WILLIAM BURNS, SADDLER, MORPETH.

ELLISLAND, 10th Nov. 1789.

DEAR WILLIAM,

I would have written you sooner, but I am so hurried and fatigued with my Excise business that I can scarcely pluck up resolution to go through the effort of a letter to anybody. Indeed you hardly deserve a letter from me, considering that you have spare hours in which you have nothing to do at all, and yet it was near three months between your two last letters.

I know not if you heard lately from Gilbert. I expect him here with me about the latter end of this week. . . . My mother is returned, now that she has seen my little boy Francis fairly set to the world. I suppose Gilbert has informed you that you have got a new nephew. He is a fine thriving fellow, and promises to do honour to the name he bears. I have named him Francis Wallace, after my worthy friend Mrs. Dunlop of Dunlop.

The only Ayrshire news that I remember in which I think you will be interested is that Mr. Ronald is bankrupt.[1] You will easily guess from his insolent vanity in his sunshine of life he will now feel a little retaliation from those who thought themselves eclipsed by him; for, poor fellow, I do not think he ever intentionally injured any one. I might, indeed, perhaps except his wife, whom he certainly has used very ill; but she is still fond of him to distraction and bears up wonderfully—much superior to him—under this severe shock of fortune. Women have a kind of sturdy sufferance which qualifies them to endure beyond, much beyond, the common run of men; but perhaps part of that fortitude is owing to their shortsightedness, for they are by no means famous for seeing remote consequences in all their real importance.

I am very glad at your resolution to live within your income, be that what it will. Had poor Ronald done so he had not this day been a prey to the dreadful miseries of insolvency. You are at the time of life when these habitudes are begun which are to mark the character of the future man. Go on and persevere, and depend on less or more success. I am, dear William, your brother,

R. B.

[1] "October 23rd. Sequestration. Mr. William Ronald, Merchant and Tobacconist in Mauchline." —*Scots Magazine*. See. vol. 1. p. 195.

TO R. GRAHAM, ESQ., OF FINTRY.

9th December, 1789.

SIR,

I have a good while had a wish to trouble you with a letter, and had certainly done it long ere now—but for a humiliating something that throws cold water on the resolution; as if one should say, "You have found Mr. Graham a very powerful and kind friend indeed, and that interest he is so kindly taking in your concerns, you ought by every thing in your power to keep alive and cherish." Now, though since God has thought proper to make one powerful and another helpless, the connection of obliger and obliged is all fair; and though my being under your patronage is to me highly honourable; yet, Sir, allow me to flatter myself, that, as a poet and an honest man, you first interested yourself in my welfare, and principally as such, still you permit me to approach you.

I have found the excise business go on a great deal smoother with me than I expected; owing a good deal to the generous friendship of Mr. Mitchell, my collector, and the kind assistance of Mr. Findlater, my supervisor. I dare to be honest, and I fear no labour. Nor do I find my hurried life greatly inimical to my correspondence with the Muses. Their visits to me, indeed, and I believe to most of their acquaintance, like the visits of good angels, are "short and far between:" but I meet them now and then as I jog through the hills of Nithsdale, just as I used to do on the banks of Ayr. I take the liberty to inclose

you a few bagatelles, all of them the productions of my leisure thoughts in my excise rides.

If you know or have ever seen Captain Grose, the antiquarian, you will enter into any humour that is in the verses on him.[1] Perhaps you have seen them before, as I sent them to a London Newspaper. Though I dare say you have none of the solemn-league-and-covenant fire, which shone so conspicuous in Lord George Gordon, and the Kilmarnock weavers, yet I think you must have heard of Dr. M'Gill, one of the clergymen of Ayr, and his heretical book. God help him, poor man! Though he is one of the worthiest, as well as one of the ablest, of the whole priesthood of the Kirk of Scotland, in every sense of that ambiguous term, yet the poor Doctor and his numerous family are in imminent danger of being thrown out to the mercy of the winter winds. The inclosed ballad on that business is, I confess, too local, but I laughed myself at some conceits in it, though I am convinced in my conscience that there are a good many heavy stanzas in it too.

The election ballad, as you will see, alludes to the present canvass in our string of boroughs. I do not believe there will be such a hard run match in the whole general election. The *Great Man*[2] here, like all renegadoes, is a flaming zealot kicked out before the astonished indignation of his deserted master, and despised, I suppose, by the party who took him in to be a mustering faggot at the mysterious orgies of their midnight iniquities, and a useful drudge in the dirty work of their country elections; he would fain persuade this part of the world that he has turned Patriot, and, where he knows his men, has the impudence to aim away at the unmistrusting manner of a man of conscience and principle. Nay, to such an intemperate height has his zeal carried him that in convulsive violence to every feeling in his bosom, he has made some desperate attempts at the hopeless business of getting himself a character for benevolence; and, in one or two late terrible strides in pursuit of party interest, has actually stumbled on something like meaning the Welfare of his Fellow-Creatures. I beg your pardon, Sir, if I differ from you in my idea of this *great man;* but were you to know his sins, as well of omission as commission, to this outraged land, you would club your curse with the execrating voice of the country. I am too little a man to have any political attachments; I am deeply indebted to, and have the warmest veneration for, individuals of both parties; but a man who has it in his power to be the father of a country, and who is only known to that country by the mischiefs he does in it, is a character of which one cannot speak with patience.

Sir James Johnston does "what man can do," but yet I doubt his fate. Of the burgh of Annan he is secure; Kirkcudbright is dubious. He has the provost, but Lord Daer, who does the honours of *great man* to the place, makes every effort in his power for the opposite interest. Luckily for Sir James, his Lordship, though a very good Lord, is a very poor politician. Dumfries and Sanquhar are decidedly the Duke's "to sell or let;" so Lochmaben, a city containing upwards of four-score living souls that cannot discern between their right hand and their left—for drunkenness—has at present the balance of power in her hands. The honourable council of that ancient burgh are fifteen in number; but, alas! their fifteen names endorsing a bill of fifteen pounds would not discount the said bill in any banking office. My lord-provost,[3] who is one of the soundest-headed, best-hearted, whisky-drinking fellows in the south of Scotland, is devoted to Sir James; but his Grace thinks he has a majority of the council, though I, who have the honour to be a burgess of the town, and know somewhat behind the curtain, could tell him a different story.

The worst of it for the buff and blue folks is, that their candidate Captain Miller, my landlord's son, is, *entre nous*, a youth by no means above mediocrity in his abilities, and is said to have a huckster-lust for shillings, pence and farthings. This is the more remarkable as his father's abilities and benevolence are so justly celebrated.

[1] In the letter the poet inclosed his verses on Grose ("Hear, Land o' Cakes"), the "Kirk's Alarm," an election ballad (the "Five Carlins"), and "To Mary in Heaven."

[2] The Duke of Queensberry.

[3] A Mr. Maxwell. A letter to him will be found on p. 154.

The song beginning "Thou lingering star," &c., is the last, and in my opinion, by much the best of the inclosed compositions. I beg leave to present it with my most respectful compliments to Mrs. Graham.

I return you by the carrier, the bearer of this, Smith's *Wealth of Nations*, Marshall's *Yorkshire*, and *Angola*. *Les Contes de Fontaine* is in the way of my trade, and I must give it another reading or two. *Chansons Joyeuses* and another little French book I keep for the same reason. I think you will not be reading them, and I will not keep them long.

Forgive me, Sir, for the stupid length of this epistle. I pray Heaven it may find you in a humour to read *The Belfast New Almanac*, or the *Bachelor's Garland*, containing five excellent new songs, or the Paisley poet's version of the psalms of David, and then my impertinence may disgust the less.

I have the honour to be, Sir, your ever-grateful, humble servant,

R. B.

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

ELLISLAND, 13th Dec. 1789.

Many thanks, dear Madam, for your sheet-full of rhymes. Though at present I am below the veriest prose, yet from you every thing pleases. I am groaning under the miseries of a diseased nervous system; a system, the state of which is most conducive to our happiness—or the most productive of our misery. For now near three weeks I have been so ill with a nervous headache, that I have been obliged for a time to give up my excise-books, being scarce able to lift my head, much less to ride once a-week over ten muir parishes. What is man?—To-day, in the luxuriance of health, exulting in the enjoyment of existence; in a few days, perhaps in a few hours, loaded with conscious painful being, counting the tardy pace of the lingering moments by the repercussions of anguish, and refusing or denied a comforter. Day follows night, and night comes after day, only to curse him with life which gives him no pleasure; and yet the awful, dark termination of that life, is something at which he recoils.

> Tell us, ye dead; will none of you in pity
> ———disclose the secret
> *What 'tis you are, and we must shortly be?*
> ———'tis no matter:
> A little time will make us learn'd as you are.[1]

Can it be possible, that when I resign this frail, feverish being, I shall still find myself in conscious existence? When the last gasp of agony has announced that I am no more to those that knew me, and the few who loved me; when the cold, stiffened, unconscious, ghastly corse is resigned into the earth, to be the prey of unsightly reptiles, and to become in time a trodden clod, shall I be yet warm in life, seeing and seen, enjoying and enjoyed? Ye venerable sages, and holy flamens, is there probability in your conjectures, truth in your stories, of another world beyond death; or are they all alike, baseless visions, and fabricated fables? If there is another life, it must be only for the just, the benevolent, the amiable, and the humane; what a flattering idea, then, is a world to come! Would to God I as firmly believed it, as I ardently wish it! There I should meet an aged parent, now at rest from the many buffetings of an evil world, against which he so long and so bravely struggled. There should I meet the friend, the disinterested friend of my early life; the man who rejoiced to see me, because he loved me and could serve me.—Muir,[2] thy weaknesses were the aberrations of human nature, but thy heart glowed with every thing generous, manly, and noble; and if ever emanation from the All-good Being animated a human form, it was thine!—There should I, with speechless agony of rapture, again recognise my lost, my ever dear Mary! whose bosom was fraught with truth, honour, constancy, and love.

> My Mary, dear departed shade,
> Where is thy place of heavenly rest?
> Seest thou thy lover lowly laid?
> Hear'st thou the groans that rend his breast?

Jesus Christ, thou amiablest of characters! I trust thou art no impostor, and that thy revelation of blissful scenes of existence beyond death and the grave, is not one of the many impositions which time after time have been palmed on credulous mankind. I trust that

[1] Blair's "Grave."

[2] Robert Muir, Kilmarnock. See Letter to him of 7th March, 1788.

in thee "shall all the families of the earth be blessed," by being yet connected together in a better world, where every tie that bound heart to heart, in this state of existence, shall be, far beyond our present conceptions, more endearing.

I am a good deal inclined to think with those who maintain, that what are called nervous affections are in fact diseases of the mind. I cannot reason, I cannot think; and but to you I would not venture to write any thing above an order to a cobbler. You have felt too much of the ills of life not to sympathise with a diseased wretch, who has impaired more than half of any faculties he possessed. Your goodness will excuse this distracted scrawl, which the writer dare scarcely read, and which he would throw into the fire, were he able to write any thing better, or indeed any thing at all.

Rumour told me something of a son of yours, who was returned from the East or West Indies. If you have gotten news from James or Anthony, it was cruel in you not to let me know; as I promise you, on the sincerity of a man, who is weary of one world, and anxious about another, that scarce any thing could give me so much pleasure as to hear of any good thing befalling my honoured friend.

If you have a minute's leisure, take up your pen in pity to *le pauvre misérable*

R. B.

TO LADY GLENCAIRN.[1]

ELLISLAND, [December, 1789].

MY LADY,

The honour you have done your poor poet, in writing him so very obliging a letter, and the pleasure the enclosed beautiful verses have given him, came very seasonably to his aid amid the cheerless gloom and sinking despondency of diseased nerves and December weather. As to forgetting the family of Glencairn, Heaven is my witness with what sincerity I could use those old verses, which please me more in their rude simplicity than the most elegant lines I ever saw.

If thee, Jerusalem, I forget,
Skill part from my right hand.

My tongue to my mouth's roof let cleave,
If I do thee forget,
Jerusalem, and thee above
My chief joy do not set.

When I am tempted to do any thing improper, I dare not, because I look upon myself as accountable to your ladyship and family. Now and then when I have the honour to be called to the tables of the great, if I happen to meet with any mortification from the stately stupidity of self-sufficient squires, or the luxurious indolence of upstart nabobs, I get above the creatures by calling to remembrance that I am patronised by the noble House of Glencairn; and at gala-times, such as New-year's-day, a christening, or the kirn-night, when my punch-bowl is brought from its dusty corner, and filled up in honour of the occasion, I begin with,—*The Countess of Glencairn!* My good woman, with the enthusiasm of a grateful heart, next cries, *My Lord!* and so the toast goes on until I end with *Lady Harriet's little angel!* whose epithalamium I have pledged myself to write.

When I received your ladyship's letter, I was just in the act of transcribing for you some verses I have lately composed; and meant to have sent them my first leisure hour, and acquainted you with my late change of life. I mentioned to my lord my fears concerning my farm. Those fears were indeed too true; it is a bargain would have ruined me but for the lucky circumstance of my having an excise commission.

People may talk as they please of the ignominy of the excise: £50 a-year will support my wife and children, and keep me independent of the world; and I would much rather have it said that my profession borrowed credit from me, than that I borrowed credit from my profession. Another advantage I have in this business, is the knowledge it gives me of the various shades of human character, consequently assisting me vastly in my poetic pursuits. I had the most ardent enthusiasm for the muses when nobody knew me but myself, and that ardour is by no means cooled now that my Lord Glencairn's goodness has introduced me to all the world. Not that I am in haste for the press. I have no idea of publishing, else I certainly had consulted my noble, generous patron; but after acting the part of

[1] Mother of Burns's patron

an honest man, and supporting my family, my whole wishes and views are directed to poetic pursuits. I am aware that though I were to give performances to the world superior to my former works, still if they were of the same kind with those, the comparative reception they would meet with would mortify me. I have turned my thoughts on the drama. I do not mean the stately buskin of the tragic muse. Does not your ladyship think that an Edinburgh theatre would be more amused with affectation, folly, and whim of true Scottish growth, than manners which by far the greatest part of the audience can only know at second hand?

I have the honour to be, your ladyship's ever devoted, and grateful humble servant,

R. B.

TO LADY W. M. CONSTABLE.[1]

ELLISLAND, 16th Dec. 1789.

MY LADY,

In vain have I from day to day expected to hear from Mrs. Young, as she promised me at Dalswinton that she would do me the honour to introduce me at Tinwald; and it was impossible, not from your Ladyship's accessibility, but from my own feelings, that I could go alone. Lately, indeed, Mr. Maxwell of Carruchan, in his usual goodness, offered to accompany me, when an unlucky indisposition on my part hindered my embracing the opportunity. To court the notice or the tables of the great, except where I sometimes have had a little matter to ask of them, or more often the pleasanter task of witnessing my gratitude to them, is what I never have done, and I trust never shall do. But with your Ladyship, I have the honour to be connected by one of the strongest and most endearing ties in the whole moral world. Common sufferers, in a cause where even to be unfortunate is glorious, the cause of heroic loyalty! Though my fathers had not illustrious honours and vast properties to hazard in the contest, though they left their humble cottages only to add so many units more to the unnoted crowd that followed their leaders, yet what they could they did, and what they had they lost: with unshaken firmness and unconcealed political attachments, they shook hands with Ruin for what they esteemed the cause of their king and their country. This language and the inclosed verses[2] are for your Ladyship's eye alone. Poets are not very famous for their prudence; but as I can do nothing for a cause which is now nearly no more, I do not wish to hurt myself.

I have the honour to be, my Lady, your Ladyship's obliged and obedient humble servant,

R. B.

[1] Lady Winifred Maxwell Constable, a descendant of the forfeited Earl of Nithsdale. This nobleman was implicated in the rebellion of 1715, but his life was saved through the heroic conduct of his countess, whose ingenuity and presence of mind enabled him to effect his escape from the Tower of London. The lady was married to William Haggerston Constable of Everingham in Yorkshire. Sir W. Scott, referring to this letter, says: "Here Burns plays high Jacobite to that singular old curmudgeon, Lady Winifred Constable. . . . I imagine his Jacobitism, like my own, belonged to the fancy rather than the reason."

TO PROVOST MAXWELL,

OF LOCHMABEN.

ELLISLAND, 20th Dec. 1789.

DEAR PROVOST,

As my friend Mr. Graham goes for your good town to-morrow, I cannot resist the temptation to send you a few lines, and as I have nothing to say, I have chosen this sheet of foolscap, and begun as you see at the top of the first page, because I have ever observed, that when once people have fairly set out they know not where to stop. Now that my first sentence is concluded, I have nothing to do but to pray heaven to help me on to another. Shall I write you on politics or religion, two master subjects for your sayers of nothing? Of the first I dare say by this time you are nearly surfeited: and for the last, whatever they may talk of it, who make it a kind of company concern, I never could endure it beyond a soliloquy. I might write you on farming, on building, on marketing, but my poor distracted mind is so torn, so jaded, so racked,

[2] Viz. the verses to William Tytler of Woodhouselee, the "Revered defender of beauteous Stuart," given at vol. ii. p. 210. The statements in regard to Burns's ancestors are elsewhere commented on. See Lockhart's *Life*, p. 1.

and bedeviled with the task of the superlatively damned, to make *one guinea do the business of three*, that I detest, abhor, and swoon at the very word "business," though no less than four letters of my very short surname are in it.

Well, to make the matter short, I shall betake myself to a subject ever fruitful of themes; a subject the turtle feast of the sons of Satan, and the delicious secret sugar plum of the babes of grace—a subject sparkling with all the jewels that wit can find in the mines of genius; and pregnant with all the stores of learning from Moses and Confucius to Franklin and Priestley—in short may it please your Lordship, I intend to write . . .[1]

If at any time you expect a field-day in your town[2]—a day when dukes, earls, and knights, pay their court to weavers, tailors, and cobblers—I should like to know of it two or three days beforehand. It is not that I care three skips of a cur-dog for the politics, but I should like to see such an exhibition of human nature. If you meet with that worthy old veteran in religion and goodfellowship, Mr. Jeffrey,[3] or any of his amiable family, I beg you will give them my best compliments.

R. B.

TO MR. GEORGE SUTHERLAND,

PLAYWRIGHT,[4] NEAR DUMFRIES, AT J. HUTCHISON'S, THE POST-OFFICE.

ELLISLAND,
Thursday Morning, [31st Dec. 1789].

SIR,

Jogging home yesternight it occurred to me that as your next night is the first night of the New Year, a few lines allusive to the season by way of prologue, interlude, or what you please, might take pretty well. The enclosed verses are very incorrect, because they are almost the first crude suggestions of my Muse, by way of bearing me company in my darkling journey. I am sensible it is too late to send you them; but if they can any way serve you, use, alter, or, if you please, neglect them. I shall not be in the least mortified though they are never heard of; but if they can be of any service to Mr. Sutherland and his friends, I shall kiss my hands to my lady Muse, and own myself much her debtor. I am, Sir, your very humble servant,

R. B.

TO MR. GILBERT BURNS.

ELLISLAND, 11th January, 1790.

DEAR BROTHER,

I mean to take advantage of the frank, though I have not in my present frame of mind much appetite for exertion in writing. My nerves are in a damned state. I feel that horrid hypochondria pervading every atom of both body and soul. This farm has undone my enjoyment of myself. It is a ruinous affair on all hands. But let it go to hell! I'll fight it out and be off with it.

We have gotten a set of very decent players here just now. I have seen them an evening or two. David Campbell, in Ayr, wrote to me by the manager of the company, a Mr. Sutherland, who is a man of apparent worth. On New-year's Day evening I gave him the following prologue, which he spouted to his audience with applause:—

No song nor dance I bring from yon great city
That queens it o'er our taste—the more's the pity:
Tho', by-the-by, abroad why will ye roam?
Good sense and taste are natives here at home.[5]

I can no more.—If once I was clear of this damned farm, I should respire more at ease.

R. B.

TO MR. WILLIAM DUNBAR, W.S.

ELLISLAND, 14th Jan. 1790.

Since we are here creatures of a day, since "a few summer days, and a few winter nights,

---

[1] Here the poet, we are told, inserted a coarse song. Burns, it will be understood, was a man of varying moods, and notwithstanding the "miseries of a diseased nervous system" and the "horrid hypochondria" of which he complains in his letters about this time, he was not altogether overcome by gloomy thoughts.

[2] The poet alludes here to the election, which forms the subject of the "ballad" commencing:—

Fintry, my stay in worldly strife,

See vol. iii. p. 71.

[3] Minister of Lochmaben, father of the blue-eyed lass, upon whom Burns wrote the fine song given at vol. iii. p. 50, beginning—"I gaed a waefu' gate yestreen." In the course of his perambulations the poet was an occasional guest of this worthy clergyman.

[4] See next letter.

[5] See Prologue at page 63, vol. iii.

and the life of man is at an end," why, my dear much esteemed Sir, should you and I let negligent indolence, for I know it is nothing worse, step in between us and bar the enjoyment of a mutual correspondence. We are not shapen out of the common, heavy, methodical clod, the elemental stuff of the plodding selfish race, the sons of Arithmetic and Prudence; our feelings and hearts are not benumbed and poisoned by the cursed influence of riches, which, whatever blessing they may be in other respects, are no friends to the nobler qualities of the heart: in the name of random sensibility, then, let never the moon change on our silence any more. I have had a tract of bad health most part of this winter, else you had heard from me long ere now. Thank heaven, I am now got so much better as to be able to partake a little in the enjoyments of life.

Our friend, Cunningham, will perhaps have told you of my going into the Excise. The truth is, I found it a very convenient business to have £50 per annum, nor have I yet felt any of these mortifying circumstances in it that I was lead to fear.

Feb. 2*d.*—I have not for sheer hurry of business been able to spare five minutes to finish my letter. Besides my farm business, I ride on my Excise matters at least 200 miles every week.—I have not by any means given up the Muses.—You will see in the 3d vol. of Johnson's Scots songs that I have contributed my mite there.

But, my dear Sir, little ones that look up to you for paternal protection, are an important charge. I have already two fine healthy stout little fellows, and I wish to throw some light upon them. I have a thousand reveries and schemes about them, and their future destiny. Not that I am a Utopian projector in these things. I am resolved never to breed up a son of mine to any of the learned professions. I know the value of independence; and since I cannot give my sons an independent fortune, I shall give them an independent line of life. What a chaos of hurry, chance, and changes is this world, when one sits soberly down to reflect on it! To a father, who himself knows the world, the thought that he shall have sons to usher into it, must fill him with dread; but if he have daughters, the prospect in a thoughtful moment is apt to shock him.

I hope Mrs. Fordyce and the two young ladies are well. Do let me forget that they are nieces of yours, and let me say that I never saw a more interesting, sweeter pair of sisters in my life. I am the fool of my feelings and attachments. I often take up a volume of my Spenser[1] to realize you to my imagination, and think over the social scenes we have had together. God grant that there may be another world more congenial to honest fellows beyond this—a world where these rubs and plagues of absence, distance, misfortunes, ill health, &c. shall no more damp hilarity and divide friendship. This I know is your throng season, but half a page will much oblige, my dear Sir, yours sincerely,

R. B.

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

ELLISLAND, 25th January, 1790.

It has been owing to unremitting hurry of business that I have not written to you, Madam, long ere now. My health is greatly better, and I now begin once more to share in satisfaction and enjoyment with the rest of my fellow-creatures.

Many thanks, my much esteemed friend, for your kind letter; but why will you make me run the risk of being contemptible and mercenary in my own eyes?[2] When I pique myself on my independent spirit, I hope it is neither poetic licence, nor poetic rant: and I am so flattered with the honour you have done me, in making me your compeer in friendship and friendly correspondence, that I cannot without pain, and a degree of mortification, be reminded of the real inequality between our situations.

Most sincerely do I rejoice with you, dear Madam, in the good news of Anthony. Not only your anxiety about his fate, but my own esteem for such a noble, warm-hearted, manly young fellow, in the little I had of his acquaintance, has interested me deeply in his fortunes.

Falconer, the unfortunate author of the "Shipwreck," which you so much admire, is no more.

[1] This was a copy that had been presented to the poet by his present correspondent.

[2] This refers probably to some present that Mrs. Dunlop had given to the bard.

After witnessing the dreadful catastrophe he so feelingly describes in his poem, and after weathering many hard gales of fortune, he went to the bottom with the Aurora frigate!

I forget what part of Scotland had the honour of giving him birth; but he was the son of obscurity and misfortune.[1] He was one of those daring adventurous spirits, which Scotland, beyond any other country, is remarkable for producing. Little does the fond mother think, as she hangs delighted over the sweet little leech at her bosom, where the poor fellow may hereafter wander, and what may be his fate. I remember a stanza in an old Scottish ballad, which, notwithstanding its rude simplicity, speaks feelingly to the heart:—

> Little did my mother think,
> That day she cradled me,
> What land I was to travel in,
> Or what death I should die![2]

Old Scottish songs are, you know, a favourite study and pursuit of mine, and now I am on that subject, allow me to give you two stanzas of another old simple ballad, which I am sure will please you. The catastrophe of the piece is a poor ruined female, lamenting her fate. She concludes with this pathetic wish:—

> O that my father had ne'er on me smil'd;
> O that my mother had ne'er to me sung!
> O that my cradle had never been rock'd;
> But that I had died when I was young.
>
> O that the grave it were my bed;
> My blankets were my winding sheet;
> The clocks and the worms my bedfellows a';
> And O sae sound as I should sleep![3]

I do not remember in all my reading to have met with any thing more truly the language of misery, than the exclamation in the last line. Misery is like love; to speak its language truly, the author must have felt it.

I am every day expecting the doctor to give your little godson[4] the small-pox. They are *rife* in the country, and I tremble for his fate. By the way, I cannot help congratulating you on his looks and spirit. Every person who sees him, acknowledges him to be the finest, handsomest child he has ever seen. I am myself delighted with the manly swell of his little chest, and a certain miniature dignity in the carriage of his head, and the glance of his fine black eye, which promise the undaunted gallantry of an independent mind.

I thought to have sent you some rhymes, but time forbids. I promise you poetry until you are tired of it, next time I have the honour of assuring you how truly I am, &c.

R. B.

[1] William Falconer, author of "The Shipwreck, a Poem," was born in Edinburgh about the year 1730. His father was a barber and wig maker in the Netherbow. The *Aurora* frigate was lost in the autumn of 1769.

[2] This verse occurs in the pathetic old ballad called "the Queen's Maries," or "Mary Hamilton."

[3] This seems to have been a version of, or a song similar in subject to, the well-known and pathetic 'O waly, waly up the bank."

[4] Francis Wallace Burns, the poet's second son.

TO MR. G. S. SUTHERLAND,

DUMFRIES THEATRE.[5]

Monday Morning, [1st Feb. 1790.]

I was much disappointed, my dear Sir, in wanting your most agreeable company yesterday. However, I heartily pray for good weather next Sunday; and, whatever aërial Being has the guidance of the elements, may take any other half-dozen of Sundays he pleases and clothe them with

> Vapours and clouds and storms
> Until he terrify himself,
> At combustion of his own raising.

I shall see you on Wednesday forenoon. In the greatest hurry, &c.,

R. B.

TO MR. PETER HILL,

BOOKSELLER, EDINBURGH.

ELLISLAND, 2d Feb. 1790.

No! I will not say one word about apologies or excuses for not writing—I am a poor, damned, rascally gauger, condemned to gallop at least 200 miles every week to inspect dirty ponds and yeasty barrels, and where can I find time to write to, or importance to interest, any body? The upbraidings of my conscience, nay the upbraidings of my wife, have perse-

[5] Accompanying this note was the "Scots Prologue" commencing

> What needs this din about the town o' Lon'on.

See vol. iii. p. 65.

cuted me on your account these two or three months past. I wish to God I was a great man, that my correspondence might throw light upon you, to let the world see what you really are: and then I would make your fortune, without putting my hand in my pocket for you, which, like all other great men, I suppose I would avoid as much as possible. What are you doing, and how are you doing? Have you lately seen any of my few friends? What has become of the BOROUGH REFORM, or how is the fate of my poor namesake Mademoiselle Burns decided?[1] Which of their grave lordships can lay his hand on his heart, and say that he has not taken advantage of such frailty? Nay, if we may judge by near six thousand years' experience, can the world do without such frailty? O man! but for thee and thy selfish appetites, and dishonest artifices, that beauteous form, and that once innocent and still ingenuous mind, might have shone conspicuous and lovely in the faithful wife, and the affectionate mother; and shall the unfortunate sacrifice to thy pleasures have no claim on thy humanity! As for those flinty-bosomed puritanical prosecutors of female frailty, and persecutors of female charms—I am quite sober—I am dispassionate—to show that I am so, I shall mend my pen ere I proceed. It is written, "Thou shalt not take the name of the L—d thy G—d in vain;" so I neither say, "G— curse them!" nor "G— blast them!" nor "G— damn them!" but may Woman curse them! may Woman blast them! may Woman damn them! . . . And when many years and much port, and great business have delivered them over to vulture gouts and aspen palsies, then may they be tantalised with the impotent desires, which like ghosts haunt their bosoms, when all their powers to give or receive enjoyment are forever asleep in the sepulchre of their fathers!!!

Now for business. Our book society owe you still £1, 4*s.*: a friend of mine will, I suppose, have given you some money for me (it is about £3, 10*s.* or so), from which pay yourself the Monkland Friendly Society's account, and likewise Mr. Neilson's account, and send me a copy of it. The gentleman that will have given you the money will be Mr. Allan Masterton, writing master in Carrubber's Close. I saw lately, in a review, some extracts from a new poem, called the "Village Curate;" send it me. I want likewise a cheap copy of "The World." Mr. Armstrong, the young poet, who does me the honour to mention me so kindly in his works, please give him my best thanks for the copy of his book.—I shall write him, my first leisure hour. I like his poetry much, but I think his style in prose quite astonishing.

What is become of that veteran of Genius, Wit, and Bawdry, Smellie, and his book? Give him my compliments. Does Mr. Graham of Gartmore ever enter your shop now? He

[1] One of Burns's epigrams is "On Miss Burns" (vol. ii. p. 209). The lady in question was a "fair but frail" one in Edinburgh at this time, distinguished among the sisterhood for her beauty and accomplishments. She represented herself as a native of Durham, in England, where her father had once been a wealthy merchant, and her superior education and personal demeanour at least betokened an acquaintance with the better class of society. *Burns* was supposed to be an assumed name.

In the above letter, the inquiry made about the fate of Miss Burns, regards a case of hers which came before the police court at Edinburgh, and which excited at the time unusual sensation. On a complaint of some of her neighbours, Bailie Creech, the sitting magistrate, and, as will be recollected, the poet's publisher, sentenced her to be banished forth of the city, under the penalty, in case of return, of being drummed through the streets, besides confinement in the house of correction for six months. Against this severe sentence Miss Burns entered an appeal to the Court of Session, by presenting a bill of suspension, which was *sustained*, as no riot or disturbance in her house was proved against her. The decision of the Court of Session was a source of great annoyance to Bailie Creech, and many squibs were circulated on the occasion, calculated to increase his magisterial indignation. Among others, the following announcement appeared in a London journal: "We understand that Bailie Creech, of literary celebrity in Edinburgh, is about to lead the beautiful and accomplished Miss Burns to the hymeneal altar." An action of damages was threatened against the editor unless he would immediately give a complete contradiction to this statement. The counter-statement appeared, but certainly did not mend the matter. It was as follows: "In a former number, we noticed the intended marriage between Bailie Creech of Edinburgh, and the beautiful Miss Burns of the same place. We have now the authority of that gentleman to say, that the proposed marriage is *not* to take place, matters having been otherwise arranged, to the mutual satisfaction of both parties and their respective friends!"

Miss Burns died of a decline at Rosslyn in 1792. A stone in the churchyard there records the place of her interment. Figures of her are to be found among *Kay's Portraits.*

is the noblest instance of great talents, great fortune, and great worth that ever I saw in conjunction.

Remember me to Mrs. Hill, and believe me to be, my dear Sir, ever yours,

R. B.

TO MR. W. NICOL.

ELLISLAND, Feb. 9th, 1790.

MY DEAR SIR,

That damned mare of yours is dead. I would freely have given her price to have saved her; she has vexed me beyond description. Indebted as I was to your goodness beyond what I can ever repay, I eagerly grasped at your offer to have the mare with me. That I might at least show my readiness in wishing to be grateful, I took every care of her in my power. She was never crossed for riding above half a score of times by me or in my keeping. I drew her in the plough, one of three, for one poor week. I refused fifty-five shillings for her, which was the highest bode I could squeeze for her. I fed her up and had her in fine order for Dumfries fair; when four or five days before the fair, she was seized with an unaccountable disorder in the sinews, or somewhere in the bones of the neck; with a weakness or total want of power in her fillets, and in short the whole vertebræ of her spine seemed to be diseased and unhinged, and in eight-and-forty hours, in spite of the two best farriers in the country, she died and be damned to her! The farriers said that she had been quite strained in the fillets beyond cure before you had bought her; and that the poor devil, though she might keep a little flesh, had been jaded and quite worn out with fatigue and oppression. While she was with me, she was under my own eye, and I assure you, my much valued friend, every thing was done for her that could be done; and the accident has vexed me to the heart. In fact, I could not pluck up spirits to write to you, on account of this unfortunate business.

There is little new in this country. Our theatrical company, of which you must have heard, leave us this week. Their merit and character are indeed very great, both on the stage and in private life; not a worthless creature among them; and their encouragement has been accordingly. Their usual run is from eighteen to twenty-five pounds a night: seldom less than the one, and the house will hold no more than the other. There have been repeated instances of sending away six, and eight, and ten pounds a night for want of room. A new theatre is to be built by subscription; the first stone is to be laid on Friday first to come. Three hundred guineas have been raised by thirty subscribers, and thirty more might have been got if wanted. The manager, Mr. Sutherland, was introduced to me by a friend from Ayr; and a worthier or cleverer fellow I have rarely met with. Some of our clergy have slipt in by stealth now and then; but they have got up a farce of their own. You must have heard how the Rev. Mr. Lawson of Kirkmahoe, seconded by the Rev. Mr. Kirkpatrick of Dunscore, and the rest of that faction, have accused, in formal process, the unfortunate and Rev. Mr. Heron of Kirkgunzeon, that, in ordaining Mr. Neilson to the cure of souls in Kirkbean, he, the said Heron, feloniously and treasonably bound the said Neilson to the Confession of Faith, *so far as it was agreeable to reason and the word of God!*

Mrs. B. begs to be remembered most gratefully to you. Little Bobby and Frank are charmingly well and healthy. I am jaded to death with fatigue. For these two or three months, on an average, I have not ridden less than two hundred miles per week. I have done little in the poetic way. I have given Mr. Sutherland two Prologues; one of which was delivered last week. I have likewise strung four or five barbarous stanzas, to the tune of Chevy Chase, by way of Elegy on your poor unfortunate mare, beginning (the name she got here was Peg Nicholson)

> Peg Nicholson was a good bay mare,
> As ever trod on airn;
> But now she's floating down the Nith,
> And past the mouth o' Cairn.[1]

My best compliments to Mrs. Nicol, and little Neddy, and all the family. I hope Ned is a good scholar, and will come out to gather nuts and apples with me next harvest. I am ever, my dearest Friend, yours,

R. B.

[1] See p. 69, vol. iii.

TO WILLIAM BURNS, SADDLER,

NEWCASTLE-ON-TYNE.

ELLISLAND, 10th February, 1790.

MY DEAR WILLIAM,

I would have written you sooner, but I have mislaid Mr. Murdoch's letter, and cannot for my life lay my hand on it; so I cannot write to him for want of a direction. If I find it afterwards, I will write him and inclose it to you in London. Now that you are setting out for that place, put on manly resolve, and determine to persevere; and in that case you will less or more be sure of success. One or two things let me particularize to you. London swarms with worthless wretches who prey on their fellow-creatures' thoughtlessness or inexperience. Be cautious in forming connections with comrades and companions. You can be pretty good company to yourself, and you cannot be too shy of letting anybody know you further than to know you as a saddler. Another caution: I give you great credit for your sobriety with respect to that universal vice, bad women. It is an impulse the hardest to be restrained; for if once a man accustoms himself to the gratifications of that impulse, it is then nearly, or altogether impossible to restrain it. W——g is a most ruinous, expensive species of dissipation. Is spending a poor fellow's money, with which he ought to clothe and support himself, nothing? W——g has ninety-nine chances in a hundred to bring on a man the most nauseous and excruciating diseases to which human nature is liable. Are disease and an impaired constitution trifling considerations? All this independent of the criminality of it.

I have gotten the Excise division, in the middle of which I live. Poor little Frank is this morning at the height in the small-pox. I got him inoculated, and I hope he is in a good way.

Write me before you leave Newcastle, and as soon as you reach London. In a word, if you ever be, as perhaps you may be in a strait for a little ready cash, you know my direction. I shall not see you beat, while you fight like a man. Farewell! God bless you!

R. B.[1]

[1] The following is William's reply to the above letter, and has a melancholy interest as being the last preserved item of the correspondence that passed between the brothers:—

"LONDON, 21st March, 1790.

"DEAR BROTHER,

"I have been here three weeks come Tuesday, and would have written you sooner but was not settled in a place of work:—We were ten days on our passage from Shields; the weather being calm I was not sick, except one day when it blew pretty hard. I got into work the Friday after I came to town; I wrought there only eight days, their job being done. I got work again in a shop in the Strand, the next day after I left my former master. It is only a temporary place, but I expect to be settled soon in a shop to my mind, although it will be a harder task than I at first imagined, for there are such swarms of fresh hands just come from the country, that the town is quite overstocked, and except one is a particularly good workman (which you know I am not, nor I am afraid will ever be), it is hard to get a place. However, I don't yet despair to bring up my leeway, and shall endeavour if possible to sail within three or four points of the wind. The encouragement here is not what I expected, wages being very low in proportion to the expense of living, but yet, if I can only lay by the money that is spent by others in my situation in dissipation and riot, I expect soon to return you the money I borrowed of you, and live comfortably besides.

"In the meantime I wish you would send up all my best linen shirts to London, which you may easily do by sending them to some of your Edinburgh friends to be shipped from Leith. Some of them are too little: don't send any but what are good, and I wish one of my sisters could find as much time as to trim my shirts at the breast, for there is no such thing to be seen here as a plain shirt, even for wearing, which is what I want these for. I mean to get one or two new shirts here for Sundays, but I assure you that linen here is a very expensive article. I am going to write to Gilbert to send me an Ayrshire cheese; if he can spare it he will send it to you, and you may send it with the shirts, but I expect to hear from you before that time. The cheese I could get here; but I will have a pride in eating Ayrshire cheese in London, and the expense of sending it will be little, as you are sending the shirts anyhow.

"I write this by J. Stevenson, in his lodgings, while he is writing to Gilbert. He is well and hearty, which is a blessing to me as well as to him. We were at Covent Garden chapel this forenoon, to hear the 'Calf'[2] preach: he is grown very fat, and is as boisterous as ever. There is a whole colony of Kilmarnock people here, so we don't want for acquaintance.

"Remember me to my sisters and all the family. I shall give you all the observations I have made on London in my next, when I shall have seen more of it.—I am, dear Brother, yours, &c.,

"W. B."

[2] The Rev. James Steven. See poem the "Calf," vol. ii. p. 170.

TO DR. MUNDELL, DUMFRIES.

ELLISLAND, Tuesday morning [Feby. 1790]

DEAR DOCTOR,

The bearer, Janet Nievison, is a neighbour and occasionally a labourer of mine. She has got some complaint in her shoulder, and wants me to find her out a doctor that will cure her, so I have sent her to you. You will remember that she is just in the jaws of matrimony, so for heaven's sake, get her "hale and sound" as soon as possible. We are all pretty well; only the little boy's sore mouth has again inflamed Mrs. B.'s nipples.—I am, yours,

R. B.

TO MR. ALEX. CUNNINGHAM

ELLISLAND, 13th Feb. 1790.

I beg your pardon, my dear and much valued friend, for writing to you on this very unfashionable, unsightly sheet—

My poverty but not my will consents,

But to make amends, since of modish post I have none, except one poor widowed half-sheet of gilt, which lies in my drawer, among my plebeian foolscap pages, like the widow of a man of fashion, whom that unpolite scoundrel, Necessity, has driven from Burgundy and Pine-apple, to a dish of Bohea, with the scandal-bearing help-mate of a village-priest; or a glass of whiskey-toddy, with a ruby-nosed yoke-fellow of a foot-padding exciseman—I make a vow to inclose this sheetful of epistolary fragments in that my only scrap of gilt paper.

I am indeed your unworthy debtor for three friendly letters. I ought to have written to you long ere now, but it is a literal fact, I have scarcely a spare moment. It is not that I *will not* write to you: Miss Burnet is not more dear to her guardian angel, nor his grace the Duke of Queensberry to the powers of darkness, than my friend Cunningham to me. It is not that I *cannot* write to you; should you doubt it, take the following fragment, which was intended for you some time ago, and be convinced that I can *antithethize* sentiment, and *circumvolute* periods, as well as any coiner of phrase in the regions of philology.

December, 1789.

MY DEAR CUNNINGHAM,

Where are you? And what are you doing? Can you be that son of levity, who takes up a friendship as he takes up a fashion; or are you, like some other of the worthiest fellows in the world, the victim of indolence, laden with fetters of ever-increasing weight?

What strange beings we are! Since we have a portion of conscious existence, equally capable of enjoying pleasure, happiness, and rapture, or of suffering pain, wretchedness, and misery, it is surely worthy of an inquiry, whether there be not such a thing as a science of life; whether method, economy, and fertility of expedients, be not applicable to enjoyment; and whether there be not a want of dexterity in pleasure, which renders our little scantling of happiness still less; and a profuseness, an intoxication in bliss, which leads to satiety, disgust, and self-abhorrence. There is not a doubt but that health, talents, character, decent competency, respectable friends, are real substantial blessings; and yet do we not daily see those who enjoy many or all of these good things contrive, notwithstanding, to be as unhappy as others to whose lot few of them have fallen? I believe one great source of this mistake or misconduct is owing to a certain stimulus, with us called ambition, which goads us up the hill of life, not as we ascend other eminences, for the laudable curiosity of viewing an extended landscape, but rather for the dishonest pride of looking down on others of our fellow-creatures, seemingly diminutive in humbler stations, &c. &c.

Sunday, 14th February, 1790.

God help me! I am now obliged to join

Night to day, and Sunday to the week.

If there be any truth in the orthodox faith of these churches, I am damned past redemption, and what is worse, damned to all eternity. I am deeply read in Boston's *Four-fold State*, Marshal on *Sanctification*, Guthrie's *Trial of a Saving Interest*, &c.; but "there is no balm in Gilead, there is no physician there," for me; so I shall e'en turn Arminian, and trust to "Sincere though imperfect obedience."

Tuesday, 16th.

Luckily for me, I was prevented from the discussion of the naughty point at which I had

just made a full stop. All my fears and cares are of this world: if there is another, an honest man has nothing to fear from it. I hate a man that wishes to be a deist; but I fear, every fair, unprejudiced inquirer must in some degree be a sceptic. It is not that there are any very staggering arguments against the immortality of man; but, like electricity, phlogiston, &c., the subject is so involved in darkness, that we want data to go upon. One thing frightens me much: that we are to live for ever, seems *too good news to be true.* That we are to enter into a new scene of existence, where, exempt from want and pain, we shall enjoy ourselves and our friends without satiety or separation—how much should I be indebted to any one who could fully assure me that this was certain!

> Tell us, ye dead! will none of you in pity
> To those you left behind, reveal the secret,
> What 'tis you are, and we must surely be!

My time is once more expired. I will write to Mr. Cleghorn soon. God bless him and his concerns! And may all the powers that preside over conviviality and friendship, be present with all their kindest influence, when the bearer of this, Mr. Syme, and ... meet! I wish I could also make one. I think we should be Trinity in Unity.

Finally, brethren, farewell! Whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are gentle, whatsoever things are charitable, whatsoever things are kind, think on these things, and think on

R. B.

TO MR. HILL.

ELLISLAND, 2d March, 1790.

MY DEAR SIR,

At a late meeting of the Monkland Friendly Society, it was resolved to augment their library by the following books, which you are to send us as soon as possible:—*The Mirror, The Lounger, Man of Feeling, Man of the World,* (these, for my own sake, I wish to have by the first carrier); Knox's *History of the Reformation;* Rae's *History of the Rebellion in* 1715; any good *History of the Rebellion in* 1745; *A Display of the Secession Act and Testimony,* by Mr. Gib; *Hervey's Meditations; Beveridge's Thoughts;* and another copy of Watson's *Body of Divinity.* This last heavy performance is so much admired by many of our members, that they will not be content with one copy; so Captn. Riddell, our president and patron, agreed with me to give you private instructions not to send *Watson,* but to say that you could not procure a copy of the book so cheap as the one you sent formerly, and therefore, you wait further orders.

I wrote to Mr. A. Masterton three or four months ago, to pay some money he owed me into your hands, and lately I wrote to you to the same purpose, but I have heard from neither one nor other of you.

In addition to the books I commissioned in my last, I want very much, *An Index to the Excise Laws, or an Abridgment of all the Statutes now in force, relative to the Excise,* by Jellinger Symons; I want three copies of this book: if it is now to be had, cheap or dear, get it for me. An honest country neighbour of mine wants, too, a Family Bible, the larger the better, but second-handed, for he does not choose to give above ten shillings for the book. I want likewise for myself, as you can pick them up, second-handed or cheap, copies of Otway's Dramatic Works, Ben Jonson's, Dryden's, Congreve's, Wycherley's, Vanbrugh's, Cibber's, or any Dramatic Works of the more modern Macklin, Garrick, Foote, Colman, or Sheridan. A good copy too of Molière, in French, I much want. Any other good dramatic authors in that language I want also; but comic authors chiefly, though I should wish to have Racine, Corneille, and Voltaire too. I am in no hurry for all, or any of these, but if you accidentally meet with them very cheap, get them for me.

And now, to quit the dry walk of business, how do you do, my dear friend? and how is Mrs. Hill? I trust, if now and then not so *elegantly* handsome, at least as amiable, and sings as divinely as ever. My good wife too has a charming "wood-note wild;" now could we four get anyway snugly together in a corner in the New Jerusalem (remember, I bespeak your company there), you and I, though Heaven knows we are no singers; yet as we are all to have harps, you know, we shall continue to support the ladies' pipes, as we have oft done before, with all the powers of our instruments.

I am out of all patience with this vile world, for one thing. Mankind are by nature benevolent creatures, except in a few scoundrelly instances. I do not think that avarice of the good things we chance to have is born with us: but we are placed here amid so much nakedness, and hunger, and poverty, and want, that we are under a cursed necessity of studying selfishness, in order that we may EXIST! Still there are, in every age, a few souls, that all the wants and woes of life cannot debase to selfishness, or even to the necessary alloy of caution and prudence. If ever I am in danger of vanity, it is when I contemplate myself on this side of my disposition and character. God knows I am no saint; I have a whole host of follies and sins to answer for; but if I could, and I believe I do it as far as I can, I would "wipe away all tears from all eyes." Even the knaves who have injured me, I would oblige them; though, to tell the truth, it would be more out of vengeance, to show them that I was independent of and above them, not out of the overflowings of my benevolence. Adieu!

R. B.

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

ELLISLAND, 10th April, 1790.

I have just now, my ever honoured friend, enjoyed a very high luxury, in reading a paper of the *Lounger*. You know my national prejudices. I had often read and admired the *Spectator*, *Adventurer*, *Rambler*, and *World*; but still with a certain regret, that they were so thoroughly and entirely English. Alas! have I often said to myself, what are all the boasted advantages which my country reaps from the union, that can counterbalance the annihilation of her independence, and even her very name! I often repeat that couplet of my favourite poet, Goldsmith—

> ———States of native liberty possest,
> Tho' very poor, may yet be very blest.

Nothing can reconcile me to the common terms, "English ambassador," "English court," &c. And I am out of all patience to see that equivocal character, Hastings, impeached by "the Commons of *England*." Tell me, my friend, is this weak prejudice? I believe in my conscience such ideas as "my country; her independence; her honour; the illustrious names that mark the history of my native land;" &c.—I believe these, among your *men of the world*, men who, in fact, guide for the most part and govern our world, are looked on as so many modifications of wrong-headedness. They know the use of bawling out such terms, to rouse or lead the RABBLE; but for their own private use, with almost all the *able statesmen* that ever existed, or now exist, when they talk of right and wrong, they only mean proper and improper; and their measure of conduct is, not what they OUGHT, but what they DARE. For the truth of this I shall not ransack the history of nations, but appeal to one of the ablest judges of men, and himself one of the ablest of men that ever lived—the celebrated earl of Chesterfield.[1] In fact, a man who could thoroughly control his vices whenever they interfered with his interests, and who could completely put on the appearance of every virtue as often as it suited his purposes, is, on the Stanhopian plan, the *perfect man;* a man to lead nations. But are great abilities, complete without a flaw, and polished without a blemish, the standard of human excellence? This is certainly the staunch opinion of *men of the world;* but I call on honour, virtue, and worth, to give the Stygian doctrine a loud negative. However, this must be allowed, that, if you abstract from man the idea of an existence beyond the grave, *then*, the true measure of human conduct is, *proper* and *improper:* virtue and vice, as dispositions of the heart, are, in that case, of scarcely the same import and value to the world at large, as harmony and discord in the modifications of sound; and a delicate sense of honour, like a nice ear for music, though it may sometimes give the possessor an ecstasy unknown to the coarser organs of the herd, yet, considering the harsh gratings, and inharmonic jars, in this ill-tuned state of being, it is odds but the individual would be as happy, and certainly would be as much respected by the true judges

[1] The Earl of Chesterfield (born 1694; died 1773) wrote a series of "Letters to his [natural] son, Philip Stanhope," which were published the year after his death, and which have been somewhat harshly criticised by Dr. Johnson as teaching "the morals of a courtesan and the manners of a dancing-master."

of society as it would then stand, without either a good ear or a good heart.

You must know I have just met with the *Mirror* and *Lounger* for the first time, and I am quite in raptures with them; I should be glad to have your opinion of some of the papers. The one I have just read, *Lounger*, No. 61, has cost me more honest tears than any thing I have read for a long time.[1] Mackenzie has been called the Addison of the Scots, and, in my opinion, Addison would not be hurt at the comparison. If he has not Addison's exquisite humour, he as certainly out-does him in the tender and the pathetic. His *Man of Feeling* (but I am not counsel learned in the laws of criticism) I estimate as the first performance in its kind I ever saw. From what book, moral or even pious, will the susceptible young mind receive impressions more congenial to humanity and kindness, generosity and benevolence; in short, more of all that ennobles the soul to herself, or endears her to others—than from the simple affecting tale of poor Harley?

Still, with all my admiration of Mackenzie's writings, I do not know if they are the fittest reading for a young man who is about to set out, as the phrase is, to make his way into life. Do not you think, Madam, that among the few favoured of Heaven in the structure of their minds, (for such there certainly are,) there may be a purity, a tenderness, a dignity, an elegance of soul, which are of no use, nay, in some degree, absolutely disqualifying for the truly important business of making a man's way into life? If I am not much mistaken, my gallant young friend, Anthony,[2] is very much under these disqualifications; and for the young females of a family I could mention, well may they excite parental solicitude, for I, a common acquaintance, or as my vanity will have it, an humble friend, have often trembled for a turn of mind which may render them eminently happy—or peculiarly miserable!

I have been manufacturing some verses lately; but as I have got the most hurried season of Excise business over, I hope to have more leisure to transcribe any thing that may show how much I have the honour to be, Madam, Yours, &c.

R. B.

[1] "This paper relates to attachments between servants and masters, and concludes with the story of 'Albert Bane.'"—CHAMBERS.

[2] A son of Mrs. Dunlop.

TO MR. ALEXANDER FINDLATER,

DUMFRIES.

ELLISLAND, Saturday Morning.

DEAR SIR,

Mrs. B., like a true goodwife, looking on my taste as a standard, and knowing that she cannot give me any thing eatable more agreeable than a new-laid egg, she begs your acceptance of a few. They are all of them *couch*, not thirty hours out. I am, dear Sir, your obliged, humble servant,

R. B.

TO DR. MOORE.

EXCISE-OFFICE,
DUMFRIES, 14th July, 1790.

SIR,

Coming into town this morning, to attend my duty in this office, it being collection-day, I met with a gentleman who tells me he is on his way to London; so I take the opportunity of writing to you, as franking is at present under a temporary death. I shall have some snatches of leisure through the day, amid our horrid business and bustle, and I shall improve them as well as I can; but let my letter be as stupid as . . . as miscellaneous as a newspaper, as short as a hungry grace-before-meat, or as long as a law-paper in the Douglas cause; as ill-spelt as country John's billet-doux, or as unsightly a scrawl as Betty Byre-Mucker's answer to it; I hope, considering circumstances, you will forgive it; and as it will put you to no expense of postage, I shall have the less reflection about it.

I am sadly ungrateful in not returning you my thanks for your most valuable present, *Zeluco*. In fact, you are in some degree blameable for my neglect. You were pleased to express a wish for my opinion of the work, which so flattered me, that nothing less could serve my over-weening fancy, than a formal criticism on the book. In fact, I have gravely planned a comparative view of you, Fielding, Richardson, and Smollett, in your different

qualities and merits as novel-writers. This, I own, betrays my ridiculous vanity, and I may probably never bring the business to bear; but I am fond of the spirit young Elihu shows in the book of Job—"And I said, I will also declare my opinion." I have quite disfigured my copy of the book with my annotations. I never take it up without at the same time taking my pencil, and marking with asterisms, parentheses, &c. wherever I meet with an original thought, a nervous remark on life and manners, a remarkably well-turned period, or a character sketched with uncommon precision.

Though I should hardly think of fairly writing out my "Comparative View," I shall certainly trouble you with my remarks, such as they are.

I have just received from my gentleman that horrible summons in the book of Revelation—"That time shall be no more!"

The little collection of sonnets have some charming poetry in them.[1] If *indeed* I am indebted to the fair author for the book, and not, as I rather suspect, to a celebrated author of the other sex, I should certainly have written to the lady, with my grateful acknowledgments, and my own ideas of the comparative excellence of her pieces. I would do this last, not from any vanity of thinking that my remarks could be of much consequence to Mrs. Smith, but merely from my own feelings as an author, doing as I would be done by.

R. B.

[1] A copy of Charlotte Smith's *Sonnets* had been sent him. This lady was born in 1749, and married, at a very early age, a West India merchant, whose imprudence, aggravated by legal chicanery, ultimately dissipated the whole of a once handsome property, and consigned its former possessor to a prison. In this melancholy situation his wife dedicated her talents to the support of her husband and family. Her principal novels are her *Romance of Real Life, Emmeline, Desmond, Marchmont, Ethelinda, Old Manor House, Celestina*, &c. Much of the latter part of her life was passed in Normandy. She died in England in 1806. Besides the works already mentioned, Mrs. Smith wrote several pleasing volumes for young persons, and two volumes of sonnets.

TO MR. MURDOCH,[2]

TEACHER OF FRENCH, LONDON.

ELLISLAND, July 16th, 1790.

MY DEAR SIR,

I received a letter from you a long time ago, but unfortunately, as it was in the time of my peregrinations and journeying through Scotland, I mislaid or lost it, and by consequence your direction along with it. Luckily my good star brought me acquainted with Mr.

[2] "This letter," says Cromek in his *Reliques*, "was communicated to the Editor by a gentleman, to whose liberal advice and information he is much indebted, Mr. John Murdoch, the tutor of the poet; accompanied by the following interesting note.

"LONDON, HART-STREET, BLOOMSBURY, 28th Dec. 1807.

'DEAR SIR,

"The following letter, which I lately found among my papers, I copy for your perusal, partly because it is Burns's; partly because it makes honourable mention of my rational Christian friend, his father; and likewise because it is rather flattering to myself. I glory in no one thing so much as an intimacy with good men:—the friendship of others reflects no honour. When I recollect the pleasure, (and I hope benefit,) I received from the conversation of William Burns, especially when on the Lord's day we walked together for about two miles, to the house of prayer, there publicly to adore and praise the Giver of all good, I entertain an ardent hope, that together we shall 'renew the glorious theme in distant worlds,' with powers more adequate to the mighty subject, THE EXUBERANT BENEFICENCE OF THE GREAT CREATOR. But to the letter:—[*Here follows the letter relative to young Wm. Burns.*]

"I promised myself a deal of happiness in the conversation of my dear young friend; but my promises of this nature generally prove fallacious. Two visits were the utmost that I received. At one of them, however, he repeated a lesson which I had given him about twenty years before, when he was a mere child, concerning the pity and tenderness due to animals. To that lesson, (which it seems was brought to the level of his capacity,) he declared himself indebted for almost all the philanthropy he possessed.

"Let not parents and teachers imagine that it is needless to talk seriously to children. They are sooner fit to be reasoned with than is generally thought. Strong and indelible impressions are to be made before the mind be agitated and ruffled by the numerous train of distracting cares and unruly passions, whereby it is frequently rendered almost unsusceptible of the principles and precepts of rational religion and sound morality.

"But I find myself digressing again. Poor William! then in the bloom and vigour of youth, caught a putrid fever, and, in a few days, as real chief mourner, I followed his remains to the land of forgetfulness.

"JOHN MURDOCH."

Kennedy,[1] who, I understand, is an acquaintance of yours: and by his means and mediation I hope to replace that link which my unfortunate negligence had so unluckily broke in the chain of our correspondence. I was the more vexed at the vile accident, as my brother William, a journeyman saddler, has been for some time in London; and wished above all things for your direction, that he might have paid his respects to his father's friend.

His last address he sent me was, "Wm. Burns, at Mr. Barber's, saddler, No. 181, Strand." I wrote him by Mr. Kennedy, but neglected to ask him for your address; so, if you find a spare half minute, please let my brother know by card where and when he will find you, and the poor fellow will joyfully wait on you, as one of the few surviving friends of the man whose name, and Christian name too, he has the honour to bear.

The next letter I write you shall be a long one. I have much to tell you of "hair-breadth 'scapes in th' imminent deadly breach," with all the eventful history of a life, the early years of which owed so much to your kind tutorage; but this at an hour of leisure. My kindest compliments to Mrs. Murdoch and family. I am ever, my dear Sir, your obliged friend,

R. B.[2]

[1] Probably Thomas Kennedy, on whom Burns in early life composed an epitaph under the heading of "Tam the Chapman." See vol. i. p. 229.

[2] To the above letter Mr. Murdoch returned the following answer:—

"Hart-street, Bloomsbury Square,
London, September 14th, 1790.

"My dear Friend,

"Yours of the 16th of July, I received on the 26th, in the afternoon, per favour of my friend Mr. Kennedy, and at the same time was informed that your brother was ill. Being engaged in business till late that evening, I set out next morning to see him, and had thought of three or four medical gentlemen of my acquaintance, to one or other of whom I might apply for advice, provided it should be necessary. But when I went to Mr. Barber's, to my great astonishment and heartfelt grief I found that my young friend had, on Saturday [24th July], bid an everlasting farewell to all sublunary things.—It was about a fortnight before that he had found me out, by Mr. Stevenson's accidentally calling at my shop [a small stationery shop in Bloomsbury Square] to buy something. We had only one interview, and that was highly entertaining to me in several respects. He mentioned some instruction I had given him when

TO MR. ROBERT CLEGHORN,

SAUGHTON MILLS, NEAR EDINBURGH.

Ellisland, 23d July, 1790.

Do not ask me, my dear Sir, why I have neglected so long to write you. Accuse me of indolence, my line of life, of hurry, my stars of perverseness—in short, accuse anything but me of forgetfulness. You knew Matthew Henderson. At the time of his death I composed an elegiac stanza or two, as he was a

very young, to which he said he owed, in a great measure, the philanthropy he possessed. He also took notice of my exhorting you all, when I wrote, about eight years ago, to the man who, of all mankind that I ever knew, stood highest in my esteem, 'not to let go your integrity.' You may easily conceive that such conversation was both pleasing and encouraging to me: I anticipated a deal of rational happiness from future conversations. Vain are our expectations and hopes. They are so almost always—perhaps (nay, certainly) for our good. Were it not for disappointed hopes, we could hardly spend a thought on another state of existence, or be in any degree reconciled to the quitting of this. I know of no one source of consolation to those who have lost young relatives equal to that of their being of a good disposition, and of a promising character.

. . . . . .

"Be assured, my dear friend, that I cordially sympathize with you all, and particularly with Mrs. Wm. Burness, who is undoubtedly one of the most tender and affectionate mothers that ever lived. Remember me to her in the most friendly manner, when you see her, or write. Please present my best compliments to Mrs. R. Burns, and to your brother and sisters. There is no occasion for me to exhort you to filial duty, and to use your united endeavours in rendering the evening of life as comfortable as possible to a mother who has dedicated so great a part of it in promoting your temporal and spiritual welfare.

"Your letter to Dr. Moore I delivered at his house, and shall most likely know your opinion of *Zeluco*, the first time I meet with him. I wish and hope for a long letter. Be particular about your mother's health. I hope she is too much a Christian to be afflicted above measure, or to sorrow as those who have no hope.

"One of the most pleasing hopes I have is to visit you all; but I am commonly disappointed in what I most ardently wish for.

"I am, dear Sir, yours sincerely,

"John Murdoch."

It seems extremely singular that Murdoch let nearly two months elapse before communicating to the poet the above sad intelligence.

On the 5th of the following October Burns remitted to Mr. Barber, his brother's employer, the expense of his last illness and funeral.

man I much regarded; but something came in my way, so that the design of an elegy to his memory I gave up. Meeting with the fragment the other day among some old waste papers, I tried to finish the piece, and have this moment put the last hand to it. This I am going to write you is the first fair copy of it:—

O Death! thou tyrant fell and bloody! &c.

[See vol. iii. p. 74.

Let me know how you like the foregoing. My best compliments to Mrs. Cleghorn and family. I am, most truly, my dear Sir, yours,

R. B.

TO JOHN M'MURDO, ESQ.,

DRUMLANRIG.

ELLISLAND, 2d August, 1790.

SIR,

Now that you are over with the sirens of Flattery, the harpies of Corruption, and the furies of Ambition, these infernal deities, that on all sides, and in all parties, preside over the villanous business of politics,[1] permit a rustic muse of your acquaintance to do her best to soothe you with a song.

You knew Henderson[2]—I have not flattered his memory.

I have the honour to be, Sir, your obliged humble servant,

R. B.

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

8th August, 1790.

DEAR MADAM,

After a long day's toil, plague, and care, I sit down to write you. Ask me not why I have delayed it so long? It was owing to hurry, indolence, and fifty other things; in short, to any thing—but forgetfulness of *la plus aimable de son sexe*. By the bye, you are indebted your best courtesy to me for this last compliment; as I pay it from my sincere conviction of its truth—a quality rather rare in compliments of these grinning, bowing, scraping times.

Well, I hope writing to *you* will ease a little my troubled soul. Sorely has it been bruised to-day! A *ci-devant* friend of mine, and an intimate acquaintance of yours, has given my feelings a wound that I perceive will gangrene dangerously ere it cure.[3] He has wounded my pride!

R. B.

TO MR. ALEX. CUNNINGHAM.

ELLISLAND, 8th August, 1790.

Forgive me, my once dear, and ever dear, friend, my seeming negligence. You cannot sit down and fancy the busy life I lead.

I laid down my goose feather to beat my brains for an apt simile, and had some thought of a country grannum at a family christening; a bride on the market day before her marriage; an orthodox clergyman at a Paisley sacrament; an Edinburgh band on a Sunday evening; or a tavern-keeper at an election dinner; but the resemblance that hits my fancy best is, that blackguard miscreant, Satan, who roams about like a roaring lion, seeking, *searching* whom he may devour. However, tossed about as I am, if I choose (and who would not choose) to bind down with the crampets of attention the brazen foundation of integrity, I may rear up the superstructure of Independence, and from its daring turrets bid defiance to the storms of fate. And is not this a "consummation devoutly to be wished?"

Thy spirit, Independence, let me share;
Lord of the lion-heart, and eagle-eye!
Thy steps I follow with my bosom bare,
Nor heed the storm that howls along the sky!"

Are not these noble verses? They are the introduction of Smollett's "Ode to Independence:" if you have not seen the poem, I will send it to you.—How wretched is the man that hangs on by the favours of the great?

[1] This refers to the close of the great election contest for the parliamentary representation of the Dumfries burghs, which had stirred the country nearly ten months. See election ballad beginning:—

Fintry, my stay in worldly strife.

Vol. iii. p. 71.

[2] In this letter the poet inclosed his elegy on the death of Captain Matthew Henderson. See p. 74, vol. iii.

[3] Who the "friend" was, or what the circumstances of the case were, is now unknown.

To shrink from every dignity of man, at the approach of a lordly piece of self-consequence, who, amid all his tinsel glitter, and stately hauteur, is but a creature formed as thou art—and perhaps not so well formed as thou art—came into the world a puling infant as thou didst, and must go out of it as all men must, a naked corse. . . .[1]

R. B.

TO DR. ANDERSON.[2]

1790.

SIR,

I am much indebted to my worthy friend Dr. Blacklock for introducing me to a gentleman of Dr. Anderson's celebrity; but when you do me the honour to ask my assistance in your proposed publication, alas, Sir! you might as well think to cheapen a little honesty at the sign of an advocate's wig, or humility under the Geneva band. I am a miserable hurried devil, worn to the marrow in the friction of holding the noses of the poor publicans to the grindstone of the Excise! and like Milton's Satan, for private reasons, am forced

To do what yet, tho' damn'd, I would abhor

—and except a couplet or two of honest execration

. . . . . .

R. B.

TO MISS CRAIK,[3]

ARBIGLAND, KIRKCUDBRIGHTSHIRE.

[ELLISLAND, August, 1790.]

MADAM,

Some rather unlooked-for accidents have prevented my doing myself the honour of a second visit to Arbigland, as I was so hospitably invited, and so positively meant to have done. —However I still hope to have that pleasure before the busy months of harvest begin.

I inclose you two of my late pieces, as some kind of return for the pleasure I have received in perusing a certain MS. volume of poems in the possession of Captain Riddell. To repay one with an *old song*, is a proverb, whose force, you, Madam, I know, will not allow. What

The bee, which sucks honey from ev'ry gay bloom,
With some rays of your genius her work may illume,
Whilst the flow'r whence her honey spontaneously flows,
As fragrantly smells, and as vigorously grows.

Now with kind gratulations 'tis time to conclude,
And add, your promotion is here understood;
Thus free from the servile employ of excise, Sir,
We hope, soon to hear you commence supervisor:
You then, more at leisure, and free from control,
May indulge the strong passion that reigns in your soul:
But I, feeble I, must to nature give way;
Devoted cold death's, and longevity's prey.
From verses though languid my thoughts must unbend,
Tho' still I remain your affectionate friend,

THOMAS BLACKLOCK.

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[1] "The preceding letter to Mrs. Dunlop [written, it will be observed, on the same day] explains the feelings under which this was written. The strain of indignant invective goes on some time longer in the style which our bard was too apt to indulge, and of which the reader has already seen so much."—CURRIE.

[2] "This fragment, first published by Cromek, is placed by him and subsequent editors under 1794, and by Mr. Cunningham is supposed to be addressed to Dr. Robert Anderson, the editor of the 'British Poets.' We have little doubt that the gentleman addressed was Dr. James Anderson, a well-known agricultural and miscellaneous writer, and the editor of a weekly miscellany entitled *The Bee*. This publication was commenced in Edinburgh, December, 1790, and concluded in January, 1794, when it formed eighteen volumes. The above letter by Burns, from the allusion it makes to his extreme occupation by business, as well as from the bitterness of its tone, seems to have been written in the latter part of 1790; it was an answer, probably, to an application for aid in the conduct of *The Bee*, then about to be started. For these reasons the present editor has shifted its place in the poet's correspondence."—CHAMBERS.

That this is evident will appear by the following poetical epistle of Dr. Blacklock to the poet:—

EDINBURGH, Sept. 1st, 1790.

How does my dear friend, much I languish to hear,
His fortune, relations, and all that are dear?
With love of the Muses so strongly still smitten,
I meant this epistle in verse to have written;
But from age and infirmity, indolence flows,
And this, much I fear, will restore me to prose.
Anon to my business I wish to proceed,—
Dr. Anderson guides and provokes me to speed,
A man of integrity, genius, and worth,
Who soon a performance intends to set forth;
A work miscellaneous, extensive, and free,
Which will weekly appear, by the name of the *Bee*,
Of this from himself I inclose you a plan, .
And hope you will give what assistance you can.
Entangled with business, and haunted with care,
In which more or less human nature must share,
Some moments of leisure the Muses will claim,
A sacrifice due to amusement and fame,

[3] "Miss Helen Craik of Arbigland had merit both as a poetess and novelist: her ballads may be compared with those of Macneil, and her novels, amid much graphic force, had a seasoning of the satiric, which rendered them acceptable to all who understood their allusions. She died some years ago at Allonby; she was much of an enthusiast, and lived estranged from her family for a long period of her life."—CUNNINGHAM. Arbigland is an estate in Kirkcudbrightshire, then owned by the Craik family.

is said of illustrious descent is, I believe, equally true of a talent for poetry—none ever despised it who had pretensions to it. It is often a train of thought of mine when I am disposed to be melancholy—the fates and characters of the rhyming tribe. There is not among all the martyrologies that ever were penned, so rueful a narrative as the lives of the poets.—In the comparative view of wretches, the criterion is not what they are doomed to suffer, but how they are formed to bear. Take a being of our kind, give him a stronger imagination and a more delicate sensibility, which between them will ever engender a more ungovernable set of passions than are the usual lot of man: implant in him an irresistible impulse to some idle vagary, such as arranging wild flowers in fantastical nosegays, tracing the grasshopper to his haunt by his chirping song, watching the frisks of the little minnows in the sunny pool, or hunting after the intrigues of wanton butterflies—in short, send him adrift after some pursuit which shall eternally mislead him from the paths of lucre, and yet curse him with a keener relish than any man living for the pleasures that lucre can purchase; lastly, fill up the measure of his woes by bestowing on him a spurning sense of his own dignity, and you have created a wight nearly as miserable as a poet. To you, Madam, I need not recount the fairy pleasures the muse bestows to counterbalance this catalogue of evils. Bewitching poetry is like bewitching woman; she has in all ages been accused of misleading mankind from the counsels of wisdom and the paths of prudence, involving them in difficulties, baiting them with poverty, branding them with infamy, and plunging them in the whirling vortex of ruin; yet where is the man but must own that all our happiness on earth is not worthy the name—that even the holy hermit's solitary prospect of paradisaical bliss is but the glitter of a northern sun rising over a frozen region, compared with the many pleasures, the nameless raptures, that we owe to the lovely Queen of the Heart of Man!

R. B.

TO MR. DAVID NEWALL, WRITER,[1]

DUMFRIES.

DEAR SIR,

Enclosed is a state of the account between you and me and James Halliday respecting the drain. I have stated it at 20*d.* per rood, as, in fact even at that, they have not the wages they ought to have had, and I cannot for the soul of me see a poor devil a loser at my hand.

Humanity, I hope, as well as Charity, will cover a multitude of sins, a mantle, of which—between you and me—I have some little need.

I am Sir, yours,

R. B.

TO ROBT. GRAHAM, ESQ.,

OF FINTRY.

DUMFRIES, GLOBE INN, 4th Sept. 1790.

SIR,

The very kind letter you did me the honour to write me reached me just as I was setting into the whirlpool of an Excise-fraud court, from the vortex of which I am just emerged—Heaven knows, in a very unfit situation to do justice to the workings of my bosom when I sit down to write to the

Friend of my life, true patron of my rhymes.

As my division consists of ten large parishes, and I am sorry to say, hitherto carelessly surveyed, I had a good deal of business for the Justices; and I believe my decreet[2] will amount to between fifty and sixty pounds. I took, I fancy, rather a new way with my frauds; I recorded every defaulter, but at the court I myself begged off every poor body that was unable to pay, which seeming candour gave me so much implicit credit with the honourable Bench, that, with high compliments, they gave me such ample vengeance on the rest, that my decreet is double the amount of any division in the district.

[1] This gentleman was factor on the Dalswinton estate.—The letter refers to the construction of a drain of which Burns and his landlord were to bear the expense in common.

[2] The amount adjudicated to Burns as a reward for informing against offenders within a given time—a handsome perquisite certainly.

I am either going to give up or subset my farm directly. I have not liberty to subset; but if my master will grant it me, I propose giving it, just as I have it myself, to an industrious fellow, a near relation of mine. Farming, in this place in which I live, would just be a livelihood to a man who would be the greatest drudge in his own family, so is no object; and living here hinders me from that knowledge in the Excise which it is absolutely necessary for me to attain.

I did not like to be an incessant beggar from you. A port-division I wish, if possible, to get; my kind, funny friend Captain Grose, offered to interest Mr. Brown, and perhaps Mr. Wharton for me; a very handsome opportunity offered of getting Mr. Corbet, supervisor-general, to pledge every service in his power; and then I was just going to acquaint you with what I had done, or rather, what was done for me; that as everybody have their own particular friends to serve, you might find less obstacle in what, I assure you, Sir, I constantly count on—your wishes and endeavours to be of service to me. As I had an eye to getting on the examiner's list, if attainable by me, I was going to ask you if it would be of any service to try the interest of some great, and some *very* great folks, to whom I have the honour to be known—I mean in the way of a Treasury Warrant. But much as early impressions have given me of the horrors of spectres, &c., still I would face the arch-fiend, in Miltonic pomp, at the head of all his legions, and hear that infernal shout which blind John says "tore hell's concave," rather than crawl in, a dust-licking petitioner, before the lofty presence of a mighty man, and bear, amid all the mortifying pangs of self-annihilation, the swelling consequence of his d——d state, and the cold monosyllables of his hollow heart!

It was in the view of trying for a port, that I asked Collector Mitchell to get me appointed, which he has done, to a vacant foot-walk in Dumfries. If ever I am so fortunate as to be called out to do business as a supervisor, I would then choose the north of Scotland; but until that Utopian period, I own I have some wayward feelings of appearing as a simple gauger in a country where I am only known by fame. Port-Glasgow, Greenock, or Dumfries ports would, in the meantime be my ultimatum.

I inclose you a tribute I have just been paying to the memory of my friend, Matthew Henderson, whom I daresay you must have known. I had acknowledged your goodness sooner, but for want of time to transcribe the poem. Poor Matthew! I can forgive Poverty for hiding virtue and piety. They are not only plants that flourish best in the shade, but they also produce their sacred fruits, more especially for another world; but when the haggard beldam throws her invidious veil over wit, spirit, &c.,—but I trust another world will cast light on the subject.

I have the honour to be, Sir, your deeply obliged and very humble servant,

R. B.

TO ALEX. FERGUSSON, ESQ., J.P.

GLOBE INN, Noon, Wednesday [Sept. 1790].

Blessed be he that kindly doth
The poor man's case consider.

I have sought you all over the town, good Sir, to learn what you have done, or what can be done, for poor Robie Gordon.[1] The hour is at hand when I must assume the execrable office of whipper-in to the blood-hounds of Justice, and must let loose the carrion sons of —— on poor Robie. I think you can do something to save the unfortunate man, and am sure, if you can, you will. I know that Benevolence is supreme in your bosom, and has the first voice in, and last check on, all you do; but that insidious —— Politics, —— may —— the honest cully attention, until the practicable moment of doing good is no more. I have the honour to be, Sir, your obliged, humble servant,

R. B.

ANSWER TO THE PETITION OF THOMAS JOHNSTON.

[A certain Thomas Johnston, farmer at Mirecleugh, who had been convicted and fined £5 for making malt "without entry, notice, or license," reclaimed to the Quarter Sessions against his conviction. He declared that he

[1] No doubt some delinquent who had been guilty of a breach of the excise laws.

had been in the habit of making malt for forty years without making entry of his kiln or pond, because the malting was always effected at one operation, and not till notice had been given to the proper officer. On the present occasion notice had been sent, but it had miscarried. The following is Burns's answer to the petition, both documents being preserved in the Edinburgh monument. The letter to Collector Mitchell following this refers to the same matter.]

1. Whether the petitioner has been in use formerly to malt all his grain at one operation is foreign to the purpose; this last season he certainly malted his crop at four or five operations; but be that as it may, Mr. J. ought to have known that by express act of parliament no malt, however small the quantity, can be legally manufactured until previous entry be made in writing of all the ponds, barns, floors, &c., so as to be used before the grain can be put to steep. In the Excise entry-books for the division, there is not a syllable of T. J.'s name for a number of years bygone.

2. True it is that Mr. Burns, on his first ride, in answer to Mr. J.'s question anent the conveying of the notices, among other ways pointed out the sending it by post as the most eligible method, but at the same time added this express clause, and to which Mr. Burns is willing to make faith: "At the same time, remember, Mr. J., that the notice is at your risk until it reach me!" Further, when Mr. Burns came to the petitioner's kiln, there was a servant belonging to Mr. J. ploughing at a very considerable distance from the kiln, who left his plough and three horses without a driver, and came into the kiln, which Mr. B. thought was rather a suspicious circumstance, as there was nothing so extraordinary in an Excise-officer going into a legal malt-floor as to make him leave three horses yoked to a plough in the distant middle of a moor. This servant on being repeatedly questioned by Mr. Burns, could not tell when the malt was put to steep, when it was taken out, &c.—in short, was determined to be entirely ignorant of the affair. By and by, Mr. J.'s son came in; and on being questioned as to the steeping, taking out of the grain, &c., Mr. J., jun., referred me to this said servant, this ploughman, who, he said, must remember it best, as having been the principal actor in the business. The lad *then*, having gotten his cue, circumstantially recollected all about it.

All this time, though I was telling the son and servant the nature of the premunire they had incurred, though they pleaded for mercy keenly, the affair of the notice having been sent never once occurred to them, not even the son, who is said to have been the bearer. This was a stroke reserved for, and worthy of the gentleman himself. As to Mrs. Kelloch's oath, it proves nothing. She did, indeed, depone to a line being left for me at her house, which said line miscarried. It was a sealed letter; she could not tell whether it was a malt-notice or not, she could not even condescend on the month nor so much as the season of the year. The truth is, T. J. and his family being Seceders, and consequently coming every Sunday to Thornhill Meeting-house, they were a good conveyance for the several maltsters and traders in their neighbourhood to transmit to post their notices, permits, &c.

By why all this tergiversation? It was put to the petitioner in open court, after a full investigation of the cause: "Was he willing to swear that he meant no fraud in the matter?" And the justices told him, that if he swore, he would be assoilzied, otherwise he should be fined; still the Petitioner, after ten minutes' consideration, found his conscience unequal to the task, and declined the oath.

Now, indeed, he says he is willing to swear; he has been exercising his conscience in private, and will perhaps stretch a point. But the fact to which he is to swear was equally and in all parts known to him on that day when he refused to swear as to-day; nothing can give him further light as to the intention of his mind, respecting his meaning or not meaning a fraud in the affair. No time can cast further light on the present resolves of the mind; but time will reconcile, and has reconciled many a man to that iniquity which he at first abhorred.

[How the affair ended has not transpired.]

TO COLLECTOR MITCHELL.

ELLISLAND, [Sept. 1790.]

SIR,

I shall not fail to wait on Captain Riddell to-night—I wish and pray that the goddess of justice herself would appear to-morrow among our hon. gentlemen, merely to give them a word in their ear that mercy to the thief is injustice to the honest man. For my part I have galloped over my ten parishes these four days, until this moment that I am just alighted, or rather, that my poor jackass-skeleton of a horse has let me down; for the miserable devil has been on his knees half a score of times within the last twenty miles, telling me in his own way, "Behold, am not I thy faithful jade of a horse, on which thou hast ridden these many years!"

In short, Sir, I have broke my horse's wind, and almost broke my own neck, besides some injuries in a part that shall be nameless, owing to a hard-hearted stone of a saddle. I find that every offender has so many great men to espouse his cause, that I shall not be surprised if I am committed to the strong hold of the law to-morrow, for insolence to the dear friends of the gentlemen of the country. I have the honour to be, Sir, your obliged and obedient humble

R. B.

TO CRAUFORD TAIT, ESQ.,

EDINBURGH.[1]

ELLISLAND, 15th October, 1790.

DEAR SIR,

Allow me to introduce to your acquaintance the bearer Mr. Wm. Duncan, a friend of mine, whom I have long known and long loved. His father, whose only son he is, has a decent little property in Ayrshire, and has bred the young man to the law, in which department he comes up an adventurer to your good town. I shall give you my friend's character in two words: as to his head, he has talents enough, and more than enough for common life; as to his heart, when Nature had kneaded the kindly clay that composes it, she said, "I can no more."

You, my good Sir, were born under kinder stars; but your fraternal sympathy, I well know, can enter into the feelings of the young man, who goes into life with the laudable ambition to *do* something, and to *be* something among his fellow-creatures; but whom the consciousness of friendless obscurity presses to the earth, and wounds to the soul!

Even the fairest of his virtues are against him. That independent spirit, and that ingenuous modesty, qualities inseparable from a noble mind, are, with the million, circumstances not a little disqualifying. What pleasure is in the power of the fortunate and the happy, by their notice and patronage, to brighten the countenance and glad the heart of such depressed youth! I am not so angry with mankind for their deaf economy of the purse: the goods of this world cannot be divided without being lessened—but why be a niggard of that which bestows bliss on a fellow-creature, yet takes nothing from our own means of enjoyment? We wrap ourselves up in the cloak of our own better fortune, and turn away our eyes, lest the wants and woes of our brother-mortals should disturb the selfish apathy of our souls!

I am the worst hand in the world at asking a favour. That indirect address, that insinuating implication, which, without any positive request, plainly expresses your wish, is a talent not to be acquired at the plough-tail. Tell me then, for you can, in what periphrasis of language, in what circumvolution of phrase, I shall envelope, yet not conceal, this plain story.—"My dear Mr. Tait, my friend Mr. Duncan, whom I have the pleasure of introducing to you, is a young lad of your own profession, and a gentleman of much modesty, and great worth. Perhaps it may be in your power to assist him in the, to him, important consideration of getting a place; but, at all events, your notice and acquaintance will be a very great acquisition to him; and I dare pledge myself that he will never disgrace your favour."

You may possibly be surprised, Sir, at such a letter from me; 'tis, I own, in the usual

[1] Son of John Tait of Harvieston, under whose hospitable roof the poet spent a few happy days in the autumn of 1787. The gentleman to whom this letter was addressed was a writer to the signet, and the father of Archibald Campbell Tait, the late Archbishop of Canterbury.

way of calculating these matters, more than our acquaintance entitles me to; but my answer is short: Of all the men at your time of life, whom I knew in Edinburgh, you are the most accessible on the side on which I have assailed you. You are very much altered indeed from what you were when I knew you, if generosity point the path you will not tread, or humility call to you in vain.

As to myself, a being to whose interest I believe you are still a well-wisher; I am here, breathing at all times, thinking sometimes, and rhyming now and then. Every situation has its share of the cares and pains of life, and my situation I am persuaded has a full ordinary allowance of its pleasures and enjoyments.

My best compliments to your father and Miss Tait. If you have an opportunity, please remember me in the solemn league and covenant of friendship to Mrs. Lewis Hay.[1] I am a wretch for not writing her; but I am so hackneyed with self-accusation in that way, that my conscience lies in my bosom with scarce the sensibility of an oyster in its shell. Where is Lady Mackenzie? wherever she is, God bless her! I likewise beg leave to trouble you with compliments to Mr. Wm. Hamilton; Mrs. Hamilton and family; and Mrs. Chalmers, when you are in that country. Should you meet with Miss Nimmo, please remember me kindly to her.

R. B.

TO PROF. DUGALD STEWART,

EDINBURGH.

[ELLISLAND, October, 1790.]

SIR,

I will be extremely happy if this letter shall have the honour of introducing you to Captain Grose, a gentleman whose acquaintance you told me you so much coveted. I enclose this letter to him, and should his pursuits lead him again to Ayrshire, and should his time, and (what I am sorry to say is more precarious) his health permit, I have not doubt but you will have the mutual pleasure of being acquainted. I am, &c.

R. B.

[1] Formerly Miss Margaret Chalmers.

TO FRANCIS GROSE, ESQ., F.S.A.[2]

[ELLISLAND, 1790.]

SIR,

I believe among all our Scots literati you have not met with Professor Dugald Stewart, who fills the moral philosophy chair in the University of Edinburgh. To say that he is a man of the first parts, and, what is more, a man of the first worth, to a gentleman of your general acquaintance, and who so much enjoys the luxury of unencumbered freedom and undisturbed privacy, is not perhaps recommendation enough:—but when I inform you that Mr. Stewart's principal characteristic is your favourite feature; *that* sterling independence of mind, which, though every man's right, so few men have the courage to claim, and fewer still the magnanimity to support:—When I tell you, that unseduced by splendour, and undisgusted by wretchedness, he appreciates the merits of the various actors in the great drama of life, merely as they perform their parts—in short, he is a man after your own heart, and I comply with his earnest request in letting you know that he wishes above all things to meet with you. His house, Catrine, is within less than a mile of Sorn Castle, which you proposed visiting; or if you could transmit him the inclosed, he would with the greatest pleasure meet you any where in the neighbourhood. I write to Ayrshire to inform Mr. Stewart that I have acquitted myself of my promise. Should your time and spirits permit your meeting with Mr. Stewart, 'tis well; if not, I hope you will forgive this liberty, and I have at least an opportunity of assuring you with what truth and respect, I am, Sir, your great admirer, and very humble servant,

R. B.

TO FRANCIS GROSE, ESQ., F.S.A.[3]

[ELLISLAND, 1790.]

Among the many witch stories I have heard, relating to Alloway kirk, I distinctly remember only two or three.

[2] See following note.

[3] This was first published in the *Censura Literaria*, a work edited by the late Sir Egerton Brydges. It was found among Grose's papers and communicated

Upon a stormy night, amid whistling squalls of wind, and bitter blasts of hail; in short, on such a night as the devil would choose to take the air in; a farmer or farmer's servant was ploddling and plashing homeward with his plough-irons on his shoulder, having been getting some repairs on them at a neighbouring smithy. His way lay by the kirk of Alloway, and being rather on the anxious look-out in approaching a place so well known to be a favourite haunt of the devil and the devil's friends and emissaries, he was struck aghast by discovering, through the horrors of the storm and stormy night, a light, which on his nearer approach plainly showed itself to proceed from the haunted edifice. Whether he had been fortified from above on his devout supplication, as is customary with people when they suspect the immediate presence of Satan; or whether, according to another custom, he had got courageously drunk at the smithy, I will not pretend to determine; but so it was, that he ventured to go up to, nay into the very kirk. As luck would have it, his temerity came off unpunished.

The members of the infernal junto were all out on some midnight business or other, and he saw nothing but a kind of kettle or caldron, depending from the roof, over the fire, simmering some heads of unchristened children, limbs of executed malefactors, &c., for the business of the night.—It was, in for a penny, in for a pound, with the honest ploughman: so without ceremony he unhooked the caldron from off the fire, and, pouring out the damnable ingredients, inverted it on his head, and carried it fairly home, where it remained long in the family, a living evidence of the truth of the story.

Another story, which I can prove to be equally authentic, was as follows:

On a market day in the town of Ayr, a farmer from Carrick, and consequently whose way lay by the very gate of Alloway kirk-yard, in order to cross the river Doon at the old bridge, which is about two or three hundred yards farther on than the said gate, had been detained by his business, till by the time he reached Alloway it was the wizard hour, between night and morning.

Though he was terrified with a blaze streaming from the kirk, yet as it is a well-known fact that to turn back on these occasions is running by far the greatest risk of mischief, he prudently advanced on his road. When he had reached the gate of the kirk-yard, he was surprised and entertained, through the ribs and arches of an old gothic window, which still faces the highway, to see a dance of witches merrily footing it round their old sooty blackguard master, who was keeping them all alive with the power of his bag-pipe. The farmer, stopping his horse to observe them a little,

by Mr. Gilchrist of Stamford. The second of the stories here given is the legend which Burns extended and versified in "Tam o' Shanter." (See notes to the poem itself.) Burns was desirous that Alloway-Kirk should be included in Grose's antiquarian work, for one reason among others, that his father was buried there. We quote the following from Gilbert Burns: "When my father *feued* his little property near Alloway-Kirk, the wall of the church-yard had gone to ruin, and cattle had free liberty of pasturing in it. My father, with two or three other neighbours, joined in an application to the town council of Ayr, who were superiors of the adjoining land, for liberty to rebuild it, and raised by subscription a sum for inclosing this ancient cemetery with a wall; hence he came to consider it as his burial-place, and we learned that reverence for it, people generally have for the burial-place of their ancestors. My brother was living in Ellisland when Captain Grose, in his perambulations through Scotland, stayed some time at Carse-house in the neighbourhood, with Captain Robert Riddell of Glenriddell, a particular friend of my brother's. The antiquarian and the poet were 'unco pack and thick thegither.' Robert requested of Captain Grose, when he should come to Ayrshire, that he would make a drawing of Alloway-Kirk, as it was the burial-place of his father, and where he himself had a sort of claim to lay down his bones, when they should be no longer serviceable to him; and added, by way of encouragement, that it was the scene of many a good story of witches and apparitions, of which he knew the Captain was very fond. The Captain agreed to the request, provided the poet would furnish a witch-story to be printed along with it. 'Tam o' Shanter' was produced on this occasion, and was first published in Grose's *Antiquities of Scotland*."

We have already given a biographical notice of Grose, p. 42, vol. iii. In the introduction to his *Antiquities of Scotland* he acknowledges his obligations to Burns in the following paragraph, some of the terms of which will scarcely fail to amuse the modern reader:—

"To my *ingenious* friend, Mr. Robert Burns, I have been seriously obligated: he was not only at the pains of making out what was most worthy of notice in Ayrshire, the country honoured by his birth, but he also wrote expressly for this work the *pretty tale* annexed to Alloway Church." This "pretty tale" being "Tam o' Shanter!'

D G Hill RSA

W Forrest

could plainly descry the faces of many old women of his acquaintance and neighbourhood. How the gentleman was dressed tradition does not say; but that the ladies were all in their smocks: and one of them happening unluckily to have a smock which was considerably too short to answer all the purpose of that piece of dress, our farmer was so tickled, that he involuntarily burst out, with a loud laugh, "Weel luppen, Maggy wi' the short sark!" and recollecting himself, instantly spurred his horse to the top of his speed. I need not mention the universally know fact, that no diabolical power can pursue you beyond the middle of a running stream. Lucky it was for the poor farmer that the river Doon was so near, for notwithstanding the speed of his horse, which was a good one, against he reached the middle of the arch of the bridge, and consequently the middle of the stream, the pursuing, vengeful hags were so close at his heels, that one of them actually sprung to seize him; but it was too late, nothing was on her side of the stream but the horse's tail, which immediately gave way at her infernal grip, as if blasted by a stroke of lightning; but the farmer was beyond her reach. However, the unsightly, tail-less, condition of the vigorous steed was, to the last hour of the noble creature's life, an awful warning to the Carrick farmers, not to stay too late in Ayr markets.

The last relation I shall give, though equally true, is not so well identified as the two former, with regard to the scene; but as the best authorities give it for Alloway, I shall relate it.

On a summer's evening, about the time nature puts on her sables to mourn the expiry of the cheerful day, a shepherd boy, belonging to a farmer in the immediate neighbourhood of Alloway-Kirk, had just folded his charge, and was returning home. As he passed the kirk, in the adjoining field, he fell in with a crew of men and women, who were busy pulling stems of the plant Ragwort. He observed that as each person pulled a Ragwort, he or she got astride of it, and called out, "up horsie!" on which the Ragwort flew off, like Pegasus, through the air with its rider. The foolish boy likewise pulled his Ragwort, and cried with the rest, "up horsie!" and, strange to tell, away he flew with the company. The first stage at which the cavalcade stopt, was a merchant's wine cellar in Bourdeaux, where, without saying by your leave, they quaffed away at the best the cellar could afford, until the morning, foe to the imps and works of darkness, threatened to throw light on the matter, and frightened them from their carousals.

The poor shepherd lad, being equally a stranger to the scene and the liquor, heedlessly got himself drunk; and when the rest took horse, he fell asleep, and was found so next day by some of the people belonging to the merchant. Somebody that understood Scotch, asking him what he was, he said such-a-one's herd in Alloway, and by some means or other getting home again, he lived long to tell the world the wondrous tale.

R. B.

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

ELLISLAND, Nov. 1790.

"As cold waters to a thirsty soul, so is good news from a far country." [Proverbs xxv. 25.]

Fate has long owed me a letter of good news from you, in return for the many tidings of sorrow I have received. In this instance I most cordially obey the apostle—"Rejoice with them that do rejoice"—for me *to sing* for joy, is no new thing, but *to preach* for joy, as I have done in the commencement of this epistle, is a pitch of extravagant rapture to which I never rose before.

I read your letter—I literally jumped for joy.—How could such a mercurial creature as a poet lumpishly keep his seat on the receipt of the best news from his best friend. I seized my gilt-headed wangee rod, an instrument indispensably necessary, in my left hand, in the moment of inspiration and rapture; and stride, stride—quick and quicker—out skipt I among the broomy banks of Nith to muse over my joy by retail. To keep within the bounds of prose was impossible. Mrs. Little's[1] is a more elegant, but not a more sincere compliment to the sweet little fellow, than I,

[1] Janet Little [see letter to Mrs. Dunlop of 6th Sept. 1789], who had written some verses on the same event which Mrs. Dunlop had sent to Burns.

extempore almost, poured out to him in the following verses:—

Sweet Floweret, pledge o' meikle love,
And ward o' mony a prayer,
What heart o' stane wad thou na move,
Sae helpless, sweet, and fair!
November hirples o'er the lea,
Chill, on thy lovely form;
And gane, alas! the shelt'ring tree,
Should shield thee frae the storm.[1]

I am much flattered by your approbation of my "Tam o' Shanter," which you express in your former letter; though, by the bye, you load me in that said letter with accusations heavy and many; to all which I plead, *not guilty!* Your book is, I hear, on the road to reach me. As to printing of poetry, when you prepare it for the press, you have only to spell it right, and place the capital letters properly: as to the punctuation, the printers do that themselves.

I have a copy of "Tam o' Shanter" ready to send you by the first opportunity; it is too heavy to send by post.

I heard of Mr. Corbet[2] lately. He, in consequence of your recommendation, is most zealous to serve me. Please favour me soon with an account of your good folks; if Mrs. H.[3] is recovering, and the young gentleman doing well.

R. B.

TO WILLIAM DUNBAR, W.S.

ELLISLAND, 17th Jan. 1791.

I am not gone to Elysium, most noble Colonel,[4] but am still here in this sublunary world serving my God by propagating his image, and honouring my king by begetting him loyal subjects.

Many happy returns of the season await my friend! May the thorns of Care never beset his path! May Peace be an inmate of his bosom, and Rapture a frequent visitor of his soul! May the bloodhounds of Misfortune never track his steps, nor the screech-owl of Sorrow alarm his dwelling! May Enjoyment tell thy hours, and Pleasure number thy days, thou friend of the Bard! "Blessed be he that blesseth thee, and cursed be he that curseth thee!!! [Genesis xxviii. 29.]

As a further proof that I am still in the land of existence, I send you a poem, the latest I have composed. I have a particular reason for wishing you only to show it to select friends, should you think it worthy a friend's perusal: but if at your first leisure hour you will favour me with your opinion of, and strictures on the performance, it will be an additional obligation on, dear Sir, your deeply indebted humble servant,

R. B.

TO MR. PETER HILL.

ELLISLAND, 17th Jan. 1791.

Take these three guineas, and place them over against that damned account of yours! which has gagged my mouth these five or six months! I can as little write good things as apologies to the man I owe money to. O the supreme curse of making three guineas do the business of five! Not all the labours of Hercules; not all the Hebrews' three centuries of Egyptian bondage, were such an insuperable business, such an infernal task!!

Poverty! thou half-sister of death, thou cousin-german of hell! where shall I find force of execration equal to the amplitude of thy demerits? By thee, the venerable Ancient, though in this insidious obscurity grown hoary in the practice of every virtue under heaven, now laden with years and wretchedness, implores from a stony-hearted son of Mammon, whose sun of prosperity never knew a cloud, a little, little aid, to support his very existence, and is by him denied and insulted. By thee, the man of sentiment, whose heart glows with independence, and melts with sensibility, inly pines under the neglect, or writhes in bitterness of soul, under the contumely of arrogant, unfeeling wealth. By thee, the man of Genius, whose ill-starred ambition plants him at the tables of the fashionable and polite, must see in suffering silence, his remark neglected, and

[1] See verses "On the Birth of a Posthumous Child," p. 86, vol. iii.

[2] Supervisor-general of the excise, a subsequent correspondent of the bard's.

[3] Mrs. Henri, daughter of Mrs. Dunlop, and mother of the child referred to.

[4] Mr. Dunbar was styled Colonel of the Crochallan corps, a club of which we have already spoken. See note, vol. ii. p. 201.

his person despised; while shallow Greatness, in his idiot attempts at wit, shall meet with countenance and applause. Nor is it only the family of Worth that have reason to complain of thee: the children of Folly and Vice, though in common with thee the offspring of Evil, smart equally under thy rod. Owing to thee, the man of unfortunate disposition and neglected education, is condemned as a fool for his dissipation, despised and shunned as a needy wretch, when his follies as usual bring him to want; and when his unprincipled necessities drive him to dishonest practices, he is abhorred as a miscreant, and perishes by the justice of his country.

But far otherwise is the lot of the man of family and fortune. *His* early follies and extravagance are fire and spirit, *his* consequent wants are the embarrassments of an honest fellow; and when, to remedy the matter, he sets out with a legal commission to plunder distant provinces, and massacre peaceful nations, he returns laden with the spoils of rapine and murder; lives wicked and respected, and dies a Villain and a Lord.—Nay, worst of all, alas for helpless woman! the needy wretch, who has shivered at the corner of the street, waiting to earn the wages of casual prostitution, is left neglected and insulted, ridden down by the chariot wheels of the coronetted Rip, hurrying on to the guilty assignation; she who, without the same necessities to plead, riots nightly in the same guilty trade.

Well! divines may say of it what they please; but I maintain that a hearty blast of execration is to the mind, what breaking a vein is to the body: the overloaded sluices of both are wonderfully relieved by their respective evacuations. I feel myself vastly easier than when I began my letter, and now can go on to business. You will be so good then as to send, by the first Dumfries carrier, all, or as many as you have by you, of the following books. I am, &c.,

R. B.

TO MR. ALEX. CUNNINGHAM.

Ellisland, 23d January, 1791.

Many happy returns of the season to you, my dear friend! As many of the good things of this life as is consistent with the usual mixture of good and evil in the cup of Being!

I have just finished a poem ("Tam o' Shanter") which you will receive inclosed. It is my first essay in the way of tales.

I have, these several months, been hammering at an elegy on the amiable and accomplished Miss Burnet. I have got, and can get, no farther than the following fragment, on which please give me your strictures. In all kinds of poetic composition, I set great store by your opinion; but in sentimental verses, in the poetry of the heart, no Roman Catholic ever set more value on the infallibility of the Holy Father than I do on yours.

I mean the introductory couplets as text verses.

ELEGY

On the late Miss Burnet *of* Monboddo.

Life ne'er exulted in so rich a prize
As Burnet, lovely from her native skies;
Nor envious Death so triumph'd in a blow,
As that which laid th' accomplish'd Burnet low.[1]

Let me hear from you soon. Adieu!

R. B.

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

Ellisland, 7th Feb. 1791.

When I tell you, Madam, that by a fall, not from my horse, but with my horse, I have been a cripple some time, and that this is the first day my arm and hand have been able to serve me in writing; you will allow that it is too good an apology for my seemingly ungrateful silence. I am now getting better, and am able to rhyme a little, which implies some tolerable ease; as I cannot think that the most poetic genius is able to compose on the rack.

I do not remember if ever I mentioned to you my having an idea of composing an elegy on the late Miss Burnet of Monboddo. I had the honour of being pretty well acquainted with her, and have seldom felt so much at the loss of an acquaintance, as when I heard that so amiable and accomplished a piece of God's works was no more. I have, as yet, gone no farther than the following fragment, of which please

[1] See p. 87, vol. iii. The elegy as transcribed to Cunningham wanted the closing stanza.

let me have your opinion. You know that elegy is a subject so much exhausted, that any new idea on the business is not to be expected: 'tis well if we can place an old idea in a new light. How far I have succeeded as to this last, you will judge from what follows.[1] I have proceeded no further.

Your kind letter, with your kind *remembrance* of your godson, came safe. This last, Madam, is scarcely what my pride can bear. As to the little fellow, he is, partiality apart, the finest boy I have of a long time seen. He is now seventeen months old, has the small pox and measles over, has cut several teeth, and never had a grain of doctor's drugs in his bowels.

I am truly happy to hear that "the little floweret" is blooming so fresh and fair, and that the "mother plant" is rather recovering her drooping head. Soon and well may her "cruel wounds" be healed! I have written thus far with a good deal of difficulty. When I get a little abler, you shall hear further from, Madam, yours,

R. B.

TO THE REV. ARCH. ALISON.[2]

ELLISLAND, NEAR DUMFRIES,
14th Feb. 1791.

SIR,

You must by this time have set me down as one of the most ungrateful of men. You did me the honour to present me with a book, which does honour to science and the intellectual powers of man, and I have not even so much as acknowledged the receipt of it. The fact is, you yourself are to blame for it. Flattered as I was by your telling me that you wished to have my opinion of the work, the old spiritual enemy of mankind, who knows well that vanity is one of the sins that most easily beset me, put it into my head to ponder over the performance with the look-out of a critic, and to draw up, forsooth, a deep learned digest of strictures on a composition, of which, in fact, until I read the book, I did not even know the first principles. I own, Sir, that, at first glance, several of your propositions startled me as paradoxical. That the martial clangor of a trumpet had something in it vastly more grand, heroic, and sublime, than the twingle-twangle of a Jew's-harp; that the delicate flexure of a rose-twig, when the half-blown flower is heavy with the tears of the dawn, was infinitely more beautiful and elegant than the upright stub of a burdock; and that from something innate and independent of all associations of ideas;—these I had set down as irrefragable, orthodox truths, until perusing your book shook my faith.—In short, Sir, except Euclid's Elements of Geometry, which I made a shift to unravel by my father's fireside, in the winter evenings of the first season I held the plough, I never read a book which gave me such a quantum of information, and added so much to my stock of ideas, as

[1] Here is transcribed the elegy just as in the preceding letter to Cunningham, but with the addition of the last stanza as the poem appears in vol. iii. p. 87.

[2] Pastor of the Episcopal church, Cowgate, Edinburgh, and at that time an authority on the subject of mental philosophy. In the reminiscences of Burns, sent by Professor Dugald Stewart to Dr. Currie, he speaks of a visit paid him by the bard, and then goes on to say: "My friend Mr. Alison was the only other person in the company. I never saw Burns more interesting. A present which Mr. Alison sent him afterwards of his 'Essay on Taste,' drew from Burns a letter of acknowledgment which I remember to have read with some degree of surprise at the distinct conception he appeared from it to have formed of the general principles of the doctrine of *association*."

The above letter is the one alluded to by the learned professor.

"The doctrine here alluded to is one peculiar, we believe, to the Scotch school of metaphysicians, and mainly consists in an assertion that our ideas of beauty in objects of all kinds arise from our associating with them some other ideas of an agreeable kind. For instance, our notion of beauty in the cheek of a pretty maiden arises from our notions of her health, innocence, and so forth; our notion of the beauty of a Highland prospect, such as the Trossachs, from our notions of the romantic kind of life formerly led in it; as if there was no female beauty independent of both health and innocence, or fine scenery where men had not formerly worn tartans and claymores. The whole of this letter of Burns is, in reality (though perhaps unmeant by him), a satire on this doctrine, which, notwithstanding the eloquence of an Alison, a Stewart, and a Jeffrey, must now be considered as amongst the dreams of philosophy."—CHAMBERS.

"Mr. Stewart . . . wonders, in the passage above quoted, that Burns had formed some distinct conception of the 'doctrine of association.' We rather think that far subtler things than the doctrine of association had from of old been familiar to him."—CARLYLE.

Mr. Alison was the father of Sir Archibald Alison, Bart., sheriff of Lanarkshire, and writer of the well-known *History of Europe*.

your *Essays on the Principles of Taste*. One thing, Sir, you must forgive my mentioning as an uncommon merit of the work—I mean the language. To clothe abstract philosophy in elegance of style, sounds something like a contradiction in terms; but you have convinced me that they are quite compatible.

I enclose you some poetic bagatelles of my late composition. The one in print is my first essay in the way of telling a tale. I am, Sir, &c.,

R. B.

TO THE REV. G. BAIRD,[1] LONDON.

ELLISLAND, [February,] 1791.

REVEREND SIR,

Why did you, my dear Sir, write to me in such a hesitating style on the business of poor Bruce? Don't I know, and have I not felt, the many ills, the peculiar ills that poetic flesh is heir to? You shall have your choice of all the unpublished poems I have; and had your letter had my direction so as to have reached me sooner, (it only came to my hand this moment,) I should have directly put you out of suspense on the subject. I only ask, that some prefatory advertisement in the book, as well as the subscription bills, may bear, that the publication is solely for the benefit of Bruce's mother. I would not put it in the power of ignorance to surmise, or malice to insinuate, that I clubbed a share in the work from mercenary motives. Nor need you give me credit for any remarkable generosity in my part of the business. I have such a host of peccadilloes, failings, follies, and backslidings, (any body but myself might perhaps give some of them a worse appellation,) that by way of some balance, however trifling, in the account, I am fain to do any good that occurs in my very limited power to a fellow-creature, just for the selfish purpose of clearing a little the vista of retrospection.

R. B.[2]

[1] George Husband Baird was, at the time the above was written, a young clergyman residing at the Duke of Athole's mansion in London. He was subsequently appointed minister of New Greyfriars' Church, Edinburgh, and ultimately became principal of Edinburgh University. Baird's letter, to which the above one was a reply, is here appended:—

"LONDON, 8th Feb. 1791.

"SIR,

"I trouble you with this letter to inform you that I am in hopes of being able very soon to bring to the press a new edition (long since talked of) of Michael Bruce's Poems. The profits of the edition are to go to his mother—a woman of eighty years of age—poor and helpless. The poems are to be published by subscription; and it may be possible, I think, to make out a 2*s.* 6*d.* or 3*s.* volume, with the assistance of a few hitherto unpublished verses, which I have got from the mother of the poet.

"But the design I have in view in writing to you is not merely to inform you of these facts; it is to solicit the aid of your name and pen in support of the scheme. The reputation of Bruce is already high with every reader of classical taste, and I shall be anxious to guard against tarnishing his character, by allowing any new poems to appear that may lower it. For this purpose the MSS. I am in possession of, have been submitted to the revision of some whose critical talents I can trust to, and I mean still to submit them to others.

"May I beg to know, therefore, if you will take the trouble of perusing the MSS.—of giving your opinion, and suggesting what curtailments, alterations, or amendments, occur to you as advisable?—And will you allow us to let it be known, that a few lines by you will be added to the volume?

"I know the extent of this request. It is bold to make it. But I have this consolation, that though you see it proper to refuse it, you will not blame me for having made it; you will see my apology in the *motive*.

"May I just add, that Michael Bruce is one in whose company, from his past appearance, you would not, I am convinced, blush to be found; and as I would submit every line of his that should now be published, to your own criticisms, you would be assured that nothing derogatory either to him or you, would be admitted in that appearance he may make in future.

"You have already paid an honourable tribute to kindred genius in Fergusson—I fondly hope that the mother of Bruce will experience your patronage.

"I wish to have the subscription paper circulated by the 14th of March, Bruce's birth-day; which I understand some friends in Scotland talk this year of observing—at that time it will be resolved, I imagine, to place a plain humble stone over his grave. This, at least, I trust you will agree to do—to furnish, in a few couplets, an inscription for it.

"On these points may I solicit an answer as early as possible; a short delay might disappoint us in procuring that relief to the mother, which is the object of the whole.

"You will be pleased to address for me under cover to the Duke of Athole, London.

"G. B."

[2] To help out the bulk of the volume of Bruce's poems, Burns generously offered a number of his finest unpublished pieces, including "Tam o' Shanter." The book appeared after the lapse of several years, but contained no composition of Burns's, "in consequence," it is stated, "of the opposition of Dr. Blair

TO MRS. GRAHAM, OF FINTRY

[ELLISLAND, February, 1791.]

MADAM,

Whether it is that the story of our Mary Queen of Scots has a peculiar effect on the feelings of a poet, or whether I have in the enclosed ballad[1] succeeded beyond my usual poetic success, I know not, but it has pleased me beyond any effort of my Muse for a good while past; on that account I enclose it particularly to you. It is true, the purity of my motives may be suspected. I am already deeply indebted to Mr. Graham's goodness; and what, *in the usual ways of men*, is of infinitely greater importance, Mr. G. can do me service of the utmost importance in time to come. I was born a poor dog; and however I may occasionally pick a better bone than I used to do, I know I must live and die poor: but I will indulge the flattering faith that my poetry will considerably outlive my poverty; and without any fustian affectation of spirit, I can promise and affirm, that it must be no ordinary craving of the latter shall ever make me do any thing injurious to the honest fame of the former. Whatever may be my failings—for failings are a part of human nature—may they ever be those of a generous heart, and an independent mind! It is no fault of mine that I was born to dependence; nor is it Mr. Graham's chiefest praise that he can command influence; but it is his merit to bestow, not only with the kindness of a brother, but with the politeness of a gentleman; and I trust it shall be mine to receive with thankfulness, and remember with undiminished gratitude.

R. B.

TO MR. PETER HILL.

[ELLISLAND, February, 1791.][3]

MY DEAR HILL,

I shall say nothing to your mad present[2]—you have so long and often been of important service to me, and I suppose you mean to go on conferring obligations until I shall not be able to lift up my face before you. In the meantime, as Sir Roger de Coverley, because it happened to be a cold day in which he made his will, ordered his servants great-coats for mourning, so, because I have been this week plagued with an indigestion, I have sent you by the carrier a fine old ewe-milk cheese.

Indigestion is the devil: nay, 'tis the devil and hell. It besets a man in every one of his senses. I lose my appetite at the sight of successful Knavery, and sicken to loathing at the noise and nonsense of self-important Folly. When the hollow-hearted wretch takes me by the hand, the feeling spoils my dinner; the proud man's wine so offends my palate that it chokes me in the gullet; and the *pulvilised*, feathered, pert coxcomb, is so disgustful in my nostril that my stomach turns.

If ever you have any of these disagreeable sensations, let me prescribe for you patience and a bit of my cheese. I know that you are no niggard of your good things among your friends, and some of them are in much need of a slice. There, in my eye, is our friend Smellie; a man positively of the first abilities and greatest strength of mind, as well as one of the best hearts and keenest wits that I have ever met with: when you see him, as, alas! he too is smarting at the pinch of distressful circumstances, aggravated by the sneer of contumelious greatness—a bit of my cheese alone will not cure him, but if you add a tankard of brown stout, and superadd a magnum of right Oporto, you will see his sorrows vanish like the morning mist before the summer sun.

Candlish, the earliest friend, except my only brother, that I have on earth, and one of the worthiest fellows that ever any man called by

and Dr. Moore, who argued that from the moral tendency of Bruce's poetry, the insertion of Burns's "'Alloway Kirk' would be as gross a violation of propriety as the exhibition of a farce after a tragedy."

[1] See vol. iii. p. 88.

[2] A present of books.

[3] The original MS. of the above letter has no date; Dr. Currie and subsequent editors give it hypothetically under March, 1789. This must be too early, as Burns speaks in it of his *only* brother; now William, his second brother, lived till July, 1790. We can hardly place this letter in that year, because in his last communication to Hill, January 17th, 1791, Burns speaks of not having written him for five or six months. We are inclined to think that Mr. Hill, in acknowledging the poet's January letter, had sent him a present of books, and got this by way of reply. The allusion to "the King's Arms *here*," seems to almost warrant the assignment of the letter to the Dumfries period, beginning November, 1791, though the poet was so often in Dumfries that he might easily identify himself with the town before actually residing in it.

the name of friend, if a luncheon of my cheese would help to rid him of some of his superabundant modesty, you would do well to give it him.

David,[1] with his *Courant*, comes, too, across my recollection, and I beg you will help him largely from the said ewe-milk cheese, to enable him to digest those bedaubing paragraphs with which he is eternally larding the lean characters of certain great men in a certain great town. I grant you the periods are very well turned; so, a fresh egg is a very good thing, but when thrown at a man in a pillory, it does not at all improve his figure, not to mention the irreparable loss of the egg.

My facetious little friend, Colonel Dunbar, I would wish also to be a partaker: not to digest his spleen, for that he laughs off, but to digest his last night's wine at the last field-day of the Crochallan corps.[2]

Among our common friends I must not forget one of the dearest of them—Cunningham. The brutality, insolence, and selfishness of a world unworthy of having such a fellow as he is in it, I know sticks in his stomach, and if you can help him to any thing that will make him a little easier on that score, it will be very obliging.

As to honest John Somerville,[3] he is such a contented, happy man, that I know not what can annoy him, except, perhaps, he may not have got the better of a parcel of modest anecdotes which a certain poet gave him one night at supper, the last time the said poet was in town.

Though I have mentioned so many men of law, I shall have nothing to do with them professionally—the faculty are beyond my prescription. As to their clients, that is another thing; God knows they have much to digest!

The clergy I pass by: their profundity of erudition, and their liberality of sentiment; their total want of pride, and their detestation of hypocrisy, are so proverbially notorious as to place them far, far above either my praise or censure.

I was going to mention a man of worth, whom I have the honour to call friend, the Laird of Craigdarroch;[4] but I have spoken to the landlord of the King's-Arms-inn here, to have at the next county meeting a large ewe-milk cheese on the table, for the benefit of the Dumfries-shire Whigs, to enable them to digest the Duke of Queensberry's late political conduct.

I have just this moment an opportunity of a private hand to Edinburgh, as perhaps you would not digest double postage. So God bless you!

R. B.

TO DR. MOORE.

ELLISLAND, 28th February, 1791.

I do not know, Sir, whether you are a subscriber to Grose's *Antiquities of Scotland*. If you are, the inclosed poem will not be altogether new to you.[5] Captain Grose did me the favour

[1] Mr. David Ramsay, printer of the *Edinburgh Evening Courant*.

[2] A club of choice spirits.—See note, ii. 201.

[3] A writer or law-agent in Edinburgh, and an intimate friend of the poet's.

[4] One of the heroes of the "Whistle" contest.

[5] The inclosed poem was "Tam o' Shanter." Dr. Moore's reception of this *chef-d'œuvre*, and of the "Elegy on Captain Matthew Henderson," was somewhat cold. The following is his answer:—

"LONDON, 29th March, 1791.

"DEAR SIR,

"Your letter of the 28th February I received only two days ago, and this day I had the pleasure of waiting on the Rev. Mr. Baird, at the Duke of Athole's, who had been so obliging as to transmit it to me, with the printed verses on Alloway Church, the Elegy on Captain Henderson, and the Epitaph. There are many poetical beauties in the former; what I particularly admire are the three striking similes from

Or like the snow falls in the river,

and the eight lines which begins with

By this time he was cross the ford,

so exquisitely expressive of the superstitious impressions of the country. And the twenty-two lines from

Coffins stood round like open presses,

which in my opinion, are equal to the ingredients of Shakspeare's cauldron in *Macbeth*.

"As for the *Elegy*, the chief merit of it consists in the graphical description of the objects belonging to the country in which the poet writes, and which none but a Scottish poet could have described, and none but a real poet and close observer of Nature could have *so* described.

"There is something original, and wonderfully pleasing in the *Epitaph*.

"I remember you once hinted before, what you repeat in your last, that you had made some remarks on *Zeluco*, on the margin. I should be very glad to

to send me a dozen copies of the proof sheet, of which this is one. Should you have read the piece before, still this will answer the principal end I have in view: it will give me another opportunity of thanking you for all your goodness to the rustic bard; and also of showing you, that the abilities you have been pleased to commend and patronize are still employed in the way you wish.

The "Elegy on Captain Henderson"[1] is a tribute to the memory of a man I loved much. Poets have in this the same advantage as Roman Catholics; they can be of service to their friends after they have passed that bourne where all other kindness ceases to be of avail. Whether, after all, either the one or the other be of any real service to the dead, is, I fear, very problematical; but I am sure they are highly gratifying to the living: and as a very orthodox text, I forget where in scripture, says, "whatsoever is not of faith is sin;" so say I, whatsoever is not detrimental to society, and is of positive enjoyment, is of God, the giver of all good things and ought to be received and enjoyed by his creatures with thankful delight. As almost all my religious tenets originate from my heart, I am wonderfully pleased with the idea, that I can still keep up a tender intercourse with the dearly beloved friend, or still more dearly beloved mistress, who is gone to the world of spirits.

The ballad on Queen Mary[2] was begun while I was busy with Percy's *Reliques of English Poetry*. By the way, how much is every honest heart, which has a tincture of Caledonian prejudice, obliged to you for your glorious story of Buchanan and Targe! 'Twas an unequivocal proof of your loyal gallantry of soul, giving Targe the victory. I should have been mortified to the ground if you had not.[3]

I have just read over, once more of many times, your *Zeluco*. I marked with my pencil, as I went along, every passage that pleased me particularly above the rest; and one or two, I think, which, with humble deference, I am disposed to think unequal to the merits of the book. I have sometimes thought to transcribe these marked passages, or at least so much of them as to point where they are, and send them to you. Original strokes that strongly depict the human heart, is your and Fielding's province, beyond any other novelist I have ever perused. Richardson indeed might, perhaps, be excepted; but unhappily, his *dramatis personæ* are beings of another world; and however they may captivate the inexperienced, romantic fancy of a boy or a girl, they will ever, in proportion as we have made human nature our study, dissatisfy our riper years.

see them, and regret you did not send them before the last edition, which is just published. Pray transcribe them for me; I sincerely value your opinion very highly, and pray do not suppress one of those in which you *censure* the sentiment or expression. Trust me it will break no squares between us—I am not akin to the Bishop of Grenada.

"I must now mention what has been on my mind for some time; I cannot help thinking you imprudent, in scattering abroad so many copies of your verses. It is most natural to give a few to confidential friends, particularly to those who are connected with the subject, or who are perhaps themselves the subject, but this ought to be done under promise not to give other copies. Of the poem you sent me on Queen Mary, I refused every solicitation for copies, but I lately saw it in a newspaper. My motive for cautioning you on this subject is that I wish to engage you to collect all your fugitive pieces, not already printed, and after they have been reconsidered, and polished to the utmost of your power, I would have you publish them by another subscription; in promoting of which I will exert myself with pleasure.

"In your future compositions I wish you would use the modern English. You have shown your powers in Scottish sufficiently. Although in certain subjects it gives additional zest to the humour, yet it is lost to the English; and why should you write only for a part of the island, when you can command the admiration of the whole?

"If you chance to write to my friend Mrs. Dunlop, of Dunlop, I beg to be affectionately remembered to her. She must not judge of the warmth of my sentiments respecting her, by the number of my letters: I hardly ever write a line but on business; and I do not know that I should have scribbled all this to you, but for the business part of it, that is, to instigate you to a new publication; and to tell you that, when you think you have a sufficient number to make a volume, you should set your friends on getting subscriptions. I wish I could have a few hours' conversation with you; I have many things to say, which I cannot write. If I ever go to Scotland, I will let you know, that you may meet me at your own house, or my friend Mrs. Hamilton's, or both.

"Adieu, my dear Sir," &c.

[1] See vol. iii. p. 74.

[2] See vol. iii. p. 88.

[3] The story alluded to is from Dr. Moore's novel of *Zeluco*, and represents Duncan Targe, a hot Highlander and Jacobite, and George Buchanan, a fervid Lowlander and Whig, disputing about the character of Mary, Queen of Scots. The debate leads to a duel with claymores, in which Targe succeeds in wounding and disarming the detractor of Queen Mary.

As to my private concerns, I am going on, a mighty tax-gatherer before the Lord, and have lately had the interest to get myself ranked on the list of excise as a supervisor. I am not yet employed as such, but in a few years I shall fall into the file of supervisorship by seniority. I have had an immense loss in the death of the Earl of Glencairn; the patron from whom all my fame and fortune took its rise. Independent of my grateful attachment to him, which was indeed so strong that it pervaded my very soul, and was entwined with the thread of my existence; so soon as the prince's friends had got in, (and every dog you know has his day,) my getting forward in the excise would have been an easier business than otherwise it will be. Though this was a consummation devoutly to be wished, yet, thank Heaven, I can live and rhyme as I am; and as to my boys, poor little fellows! if I cannot place them on as high an elevation in life as I could wish, I shall, if I am favoured so much by the Disposer of events as to see that period, fix them on as broad and independent a basis as possible. Among the many wise adages which have been treasured up by our Scottish ancestors, this is one of the best, *Better be the head o' the commonalty, than the tail o' the gentry.*

But I am got on a subject which, however interesting to me, is of no manner of consequence to you; so I shall give you a short poem on the other page, and close this with assuring you how sincerely I have the honour to be, Yours, &c.

R. B.

Written on the blank leaf of a book, which I presented to a very young lady, whom I had formerly characterized under the domination of *The Rose bud.*[1]

TO MR. ALEX. CUNNINGHAM, WRITER,

ST. JAMES'S SQUARE, EDINBURGH.

ELLISLAND, 11th March, 1791.

MY DEAR CUNNINGHAM,

I received your *first* letter two days ago; the last came to hand this moment. I was highly delighted with the well-carried allegory in your friend's letter. I read it to two or three acquaintances who have souls to enjoy a good thing, and we had a very hearty laugh at it. I have felt along the line of my Muse's inclination, and I fear your Archery subject would be uphill work with her. I have two or three times in my life composed from the wish, rather than from the impulse, but I never succeeded to any purpose. One of these times I shall ever remember with gnashing of teeth. 'Twas on the death of the Late Lord President Dundas. My very worthy and most respected friend, Mr. Alex. Wood, Surgeon, urged me to pay a compliment in the way of my trade to his Lordship's memory. Well, to work I went, and produced a copy of elegiac verses, some of them I own rather common-place, and others rather hide-bound, but on the whole, though they were far from being in my best manner, they were tolerable, and might have been thought very clever. I wrote a letter, which however *was* in my very best manner; and inclosing my poem, Mr. Wood carried all together to Mr. Solicitor Dundas that then was, and not finding him at home, left the parcel for him. His Solicitorship never took the smallest notice of the letter, the Poem, or the poet. From that time, highly as I respect the talents of their family, I never see the name *Dundas* in the column of a newspaper, but my heart seems straitened for room in my bosom; and if I am obliged to read aloud a paragraph relating to one of them, I feel my forehead flush, and my nether lip quiver. Had I been an obscure scribbler, as I was then in the hey-day of my fame; or had I been a dependent hanger-on for favour or pay; or had the bearer of the letter been any other than a gentleman who has done honour to the city in which he lives, to the country that produced him, and to the God that created him, Mr. Solicitor might have had some apology —but enough of this ungracious subject.

A friend of mine who transcribed the last parcel I sent you is to be with me in a day or two, and I shall get him to copy out the two poems you mention. I have this evening sketched out a song which I had a great mind to send you, though I foresee it will cost you another groat of postage—by the way, you once mentioned to me a method of franking

[1] Here followed the lines "To Miss Cruickshank, a very young Lady," vol. ii. p. 231.

letters to you, but I have forgot the direction —My song is intended to sing to a strathspey, or reel, of which I am very fond, called in Cumming's collection of Strathspeys "Ballendalloch's Reel," and in other collections tha I have met with "Camdelmore." It takes three stanzas of four lines each to go through the whole tune. I shall give the song to Johnson for the fourth vol. of his publication of Scots songs, which he has now just in hand.

SONG.

Sweet are the banks—the banks o' Doon,
The spreading flowers are fair,
And everything is blythe and glad,
But I am fu' o' care, &c. See vol. iii. p. 91.

If the foregoing piece be worth your strictures, let me have them. For my own part, a thing that I have just composed, always appears through a double portion of that partial medium in which an Author will ever view his own works. I believe, in general, Novelty has something in it that inebriates the fancy, and not unfrequently dissipates and fumes away like other intoxication, and leaves the poor patient, as usual, with an aching heart. A striking instance of this might be adduced, in the revolution of many a Hymeneal honeymoon. But lest I sink into stupid prose, and so sacrilegiously intrude on the office of my Parish-priest, who is in himself one vast Constellation of dulness, and from his weekly zenith rays out his contradictory stupidity to the no small edification and enlightening of the heavy and opaque pericraniums of his gaping admirers, I shall fill up the page in my own way, and give you another song of my late composition, which will appear perhaps in Johnson's work, as well as the former.

You must know a beautiful Jacobite air, "There'll never be peace till Jamie comes hame." When political combustion ceases to be the object of Princes and Patriots, it then, you know, becomes the lawful prey of Historians and Poets.

By yon castle wa', at the close of the day,
I heard a man sing, tho' his head it was grey:
And as he was singing, the tears down came,—
There'll never be peace till Jamie comes hame.[1]

If you like the air, and if the stanzas hit your fancy, you cannot imagine, my dear friend, how much you would oblige me, if, by the charms of your delightful voice, you would give my honest effusion to the "memory of joys that are past," to the few friends whom you indulge in that pleasure. But I have scribbled on till I hear the clock has intimated the near approach of

That hour, o' night's black arch the key-stane.

So good night to you! And sound be your sleep, and delectable your dreams! Apropos, how do you like this thought in a ballad I have just now on the tapis?

I look to the west, when I gae to rest,
That happy my dreams and my slumbers may be;
For far in the west lives he I lo'e best,
The man that is dear to my babie and me!
See vol. iii. p. 90.

Good night once more, and God bless you!

R. B.

[1] See vol. iii. p. 90.

TO JOHN BALLANTINE, ESQ.,

AYR.

[March, 1791.]

While here I sit, sad and solitary by the side of a fire in a little country inn, and dry my wet clothes, in pops a poor fellow of a soldier, and tells me he is going to Ayr. By heavens! said I to myself, with a tide of good spirits which the magic of that sound, "Auld Toon o' Ayr" conjured up, I will send my last song to Mr. Ballantine. Here it is:

Ye flowery banks o' bonnie Doon,
How can ye blume sae fair? &c. &c.
See vol. iii. p. 91.

TO MR. ALEXANDER DALZIEL,[2]

FACTOR, FINDLAYSTON.

ELLISLAND, 10th March, 1791.

MY DEAR SIR,

I have taken the liberty to frank this letter to you, as it encloses an idle poem of mine, which I send you; and, God knows, you may perhaps pay dear enough for it if you read it through. Not that this is my own opinion;

[2] Mr. Dalziel was factor to Lord Glencairn, and this letter chiefly relates to the death of that nobleman, which took place about the end of January, 1791, at Falmouth, which he had reached on his way home from a futile visit to Lisbon in search of health.

but the author, by the time he has composed and corrected his work, has quite pored away all his powers of critical discrimination.

I can easily guess from my own heart, what you have felt on a late most melancholy event. God knows what I have suffered, at the loss of my best friend, my first and dearest patron and benefactor; the man to whom I owe all that I am and have! I am gone into mourning for him, and with more sincerity of grief than I fear some will, who by nature's ties ought to feel on the occasion.

I will be exceedingly obliged to you indeed, to let me know the news of the noble family, how the poor mother and the two sisters support their loss. I had a packet of poetic bagatelles ready to send to Lady Betty,[1] when I saw the fatal tidings in the newspaper. I see by the same channel that the honoured REMAINS of my noble patron are designed to be brought to the family burial place.[2] Dare I trouble you to let me know privately before the day of interment, that I may cross the country, and steal among the crowd, to pay a tear to the last sight of my ever revered benefactor? It will oblige me beyond expression.

R. B.

TO LADY E. CUNNINGHAM.[3]

[ELLISLAND, March, 1791.]

MY LADY,

I would, as usual, have availed myself of the privilege your goodness has allowed me, of sending you any thing I compose in my poetical way; but as I had resolved, so soon as the shock of my irreparable loss would allow me, to pay a tribute to my late benefactor, I determined to make that the first piece I should do myself the honour of sending you. Had the wing of my fancy been equal to the ardour of my heart, the inclosed had been much more worthy your perusal; as it is, I beg leave to lay it at your ladyship's feet.[4] As all the world knows my obligations to the late Earl of Glencairn, I would wish to show as openly that my heart glows, and shall ever glow, with the most grateful sense and remembrance of his Lordship's goodness. The sables I did myself the honour to wear to his Lordship's memory, were not the "mockery of woe." Nor shall my gratitude perish with me! If among my children I shall have a son that has a heart, he shall hand it down to his child as a family honour and a family debt, that my dearest existence I owe to the noble house of Glencairn![5]

I was about to say, my lady, that if you think the poem may venture to see the light, I would, in some way or other, give it to the world.

R. B.

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

ELLISLAND, 11th April, 1791.

I am once more able, my honoured friend, to return you, with my own hand, thanks for the many instances of your friendship, and particularly for your kind anxiety in this last disaster that my evil genius had in store for me. However, life is chequered—joy and sorrow—for on Saturday morning last, Mrs. Burns made me a present of a fine boy; rather stouter, but not so handsome as your godson was at his time of life. Indeed I look on your little namesake to be my *chef d'œuvre* in that species of manufacture, as I look on "Tam o' Shanter" to be my standard performance in the poetical line. 'Tis true, both the one and the other discover a spice of roguish waggery, that might perhaps be as well spared; but then they also show, in my opinion, a force of genius, and a finishing polish, that I despair of ever excelling. Mrs. Burns is getting stout [that is, strong] again, and laid as lustily about her to-day at breakfast, as a reaper from the corn-ridge.[6] That is the peculiar privilege and bless-

[1] Lady Elizabeth Cunningham, sister of the Earl of Glencairn.

[2] The newspaper in which Burns might have seen such a statement could not have had its information from a very reliable source. The Earl's family estate in Kilmaurs, including the burial place alluded to, was sold some years before his lordship's death, and his remains were interred in the church at Falmouth.

[3] Sister of the Earl of Glencairn. Her ladyship died unmarried in August, 1804.

[4] "Lament for James, Earl of Glencairn." See vol. iii. p. 93.

[5] Burns named his fourth son (born Aug. 1794) James Glencairn, in memory of the Earl.

[6] The birth took place only two days before. The child was named William Nicol, after Burns's intimate friend, the teacher in Edinburgh.

ing of our hale, sprightly damsels, that are bred among the *hay and heather*. We cannot hope for that highly polished mind, that charming delicacy of soul, which is found among the female world in the more elevated stations of life, and which is certainly by far the most bewitching charm in the famous cestus of Venus.[1] It is indeed such an inestimable treasure, that where it can be had in its native heavenly purity, unstained by some one or other of the many shades of affectation, and unalloyed by some one or other of the many species of caprice, I declare to Heaven, I should think it cheaply purchased at the expense of every other earthly good! But as this angelic creature is, I am afraid, extremely rare in any station and rank of life, and totally denied to such an humble one as mine, we meaner mortals must put up with the next rank of female excellence. As fine a figure and face we can produce as any rank of life whatever; rustic, native grace; unaffected modesty and unsullied purity; nature's mother-wit, and the rudiments of taste; a simplicity of soul, unsuspicious of, because unacquainted with, the crooked ways of a selfish, interested, disingenuous world; and the dearest charm of all the rest, a yielding sweetness of disposition, and a generous warmth of heart, grateful for love on our part, and ardently glowing with a more than equal return; these, with a healthy frame, a sound, vigorous constitution, which your higher ranks can scarcely ever hope to enjoy, are the charms of lovely woman in my humble walk of life.

This is the greatest effort my broken arm has yet made.[2] Do let me hear, by first post, how *cher petit Monsieur*[3] comes on with his small-pox. May almighty goodness preserve and restore him.

R. B.

[1] Homer's description of the Cestus of Venus is thus versified by Pope:—

> In this was every art and every charm,
> To win the wisest and the coldest warm;
> Fond love, the gentle vow, the gay desire,
> The kind deceit, the still-reviving fire;
> Persuasive speech, and more persuasive sighs,
> Silence that spoke, and eloquence of eyes.

[2] About the end of March Burns's horse had fallen while he was u[illegible]s back, with the result of fracture of the poet's [illegible]t arm.

[3] Grandson of Mrs. Dunlop. See letter to Mrs. Dunlop, Nov. 1790.

TO

ALEXANDER FRASER TYTLER, ESQ.,

(LORD WOODHOUSELEE.)

ELLISLAND, 1791.

SIR,

Nothing less than the unfortunate accident I have met with could have prevented my grateful acknowledgments for your letter.[4]

[4] The following is the letter to which the above is a reply:—

"DEAR SIR,—Mr. Hill yesterday put into my hands a sheet of Grose's *Antiquities*, containing a poem of yours, entitled, 'Tam o' Shanter,' a tale. The very high pleasure I have received from the perusal of this admirable piece, I feel, demands the warmest acknowledgments. Hill tells me he is to send off a packet for you this day; I cannot resist, therefore, putting on paper what I must have told you in person, had I met with you after the recent perusal of your tale, which is, that I feel I owe you a debt, which, if undischarged, would reproach me with ingratitude. I have seldom in my life tasted of higher enjoyment from any work of genius, than I have received from this composition; and I am much mistaken, if this poem alone, had you never written another syllable, would not have been sufficient to have transmitted your name down to posterity with high reputation. In the introductory part, where you paint the character of your hero, and exhibit him at the ale-house *ingle*, with his tippling cronies, you have delineated nature with a humour and *naïveté*, that would do honour to Matthew Prior: but when you describe the infernal orgies of the witches' Sabbath, and the hellish scenery in which they are exhibited, you display a power of imagination that Shakspeare himself could not have exceeded. I know not that I have ever met with a picture of more horrible fancy than the following:

> Coffins stood round like open presses,
> That shaw'd the dead in their last dresses;
> And by some devilish cantrip slight,
> Each in his cauld hand held a light.

But when I came to the succeeding lines, my blood ran cold within me:

> A knife, a father's throat had mangled,
> Whom his ain son of life bereft,
> *The grey hairs yet stuck to the heft.*

"And here, after the two following lines, 'Wi' mair o' horrible and awfu',' &c. the descriptive part might perhaps have been better closed, than the four lines which succeed, which, though good in themselves, yet, as they derive all their merit from the satire they contain, are here rather misplaced among the circumstances of pure horror. The initiation of the young witch is most happily described—the effect of her charms exhibited in the dance of Satan himself—the apostrophe—'Ah, little thought thy reverend grannie!'—the transport of Tam, who forgets his situation, and enters completely into the spirit of the scene, are all features of high merit in this excellent

His own favourite poem, and that an essay in the walk of the muses entirely new to him, where consequently his hopes and fears were on the most anxious alarm for his success in the attempt; to have that poem so much applauded by one of the first judges, was the most delicious vibration that ever thrilled along the heart-strings of a poor poet. However, Providence, to keep up the proper proportion of evil with the good, which it seems is necessary in this sublunary state, thought proper to check my exultation by a very serious misfortune. A day or two after I received your letter, my horse came down with me and broke my right arm. As this is the first service my arm has done me since its disaster, I find myself unable to do more than just in general terms thank you for this additional instance of your patronage and friendship. As to the faults you detected in the piece, they are truly there: one of them, the b't at the lawyer and priest, I shall cut out;[1] as to the falling off in the catastrophe, for the reason you justly adduce, it cannot easily be remedied. Your approbation, Sir, has given me such additional spirits to persevere in this species of poetic composition, that I am already revolving two or three stories in my fancy. If I can bring these floating ideas to bear any kind of embodied form, it will give me an additional opportunity of assuring you how much I have the honour to be, &c.

R. B.

composition. The only fault it possesses, is, that the winding up, or conclusion of the story, is not commensurate to the interest which is excited by the descriptive and characteristic painting of the preceding parts.—The preparation is fine, but the result is not adequate. But for this, perhaps you have a good apology—you stick to the popular tale.

"And now that I have got out my mind, and feel a little relieved of the weight of that debt I owed you, let me end this desultory scroll by an advice: you have proved your talent for a species of composition in which but a very few of our own poets have succeeded. Go on—write more tales in the same style—you will eclipse Prior and La Fontaine; for, with equal wit, equal power of numbers, and equal *naïveté* of expression, you have a bolder and more vigorous imagination."

[1] The lines expunged on the recommendation of Tytler were as follows:—

> Three lawyers' tongues turned inside out,
> Wi' lies seamed like a beggar's clout,
> And priests' hearts rotten, black as muck,
> Lay stinking vile, in every neuck.

TO CHARLES SHARPE, ESQ.,

OF HODDAM,[2]

Under a fictitious Signature, enclosing a Ballad.

[ELLISLAND, 22d April, 1791.]

It is true, Sir, you are a gentleman of rank and fortune, and I am a poor devil: you are a feather in the cap of society, and I am a very hobnail in his shoes; yet I have the honour to belong to the same family with you, and on that score I now address you. You will perhaps suspect that I am going to claim affinity with the ancient and honourable house of Kirkpatrick. No, no, Sir; I cannot indeed be properly said to belong to any house, or even any province or kingdom; as my mother, who for many years was spouse to a marching regiment, gave me into this bad world, aboard the packet-boat, somewhere between Donaghadee and Portpatrick. By our common family, I mean, Sir, the family of the Muses. I am a fiddler and a poet; and you, I am told, play an exquisite violin, and have a standard taste in the *Belles Lettres*. The other day, a brother catgut gave me a charming Scotch air of your composition. If I was pleased with the tune, I was in raptures with the title you have given it; and, taking up the idea, I have spun it into the three stanzas inclosed.[3] Will you allow me, Sir, to present you them, as the dearest offering that a misbegotten son of Poverty and Rhyme has to give? I have a longing to take you by the hand and unburden my heart by saying, "Sir, I honour you as a man who supports the dignity of human nature, amid an age when frivolity and avarice have, between them, debased us below the brutes that perish!" But, alas, Sir! to me you are unapproachable. It is true the Muses baptized me in Castalian streams; but the thoughtless gypsies forgot to give me a name. As the sex have served many a good fellow, the Nine have given me a great deal of pleasure; but, bewitching jades!

[2] In Dumfriesshire. This gentleman was father of Charles Kirkpatrick Sharpe, Esq., distinguished for his poetical and antiquarian lore.

[3] The stanzas alluded to cannot now be identified; it is possible that the tune is that entitled, "The Ewe-buchtin's bonnie," which is said to have been composed by Sharpe when he was but seven or eight years old.

they have beggared me. Would they but spare me a little of their cast linen! Were it only to put it in my power to say, that I have a shirt on my back! But the idle wenches, like Solomon's lilies, "they toil not, neither do they spin;" so I must e'en continue to tie my remnant of a cravat, like the hangman's rope, round my naked throat, and coax my galligaskins to keep together their many-coloured fragments. As to the affair of shoes, I have given that up. My pilgrimage in my ballad-trade, from town to town, and on your stony-hearted turnpikes too, are what not even the hide of Job's behemoth could bear. The coat on my back is no more: I shall not speak evil of the dead. It would be equally unhandsome and ungrateful to find fault with my old surtout, which so kindly supplies and conceals the want of that coat. My hat indeed is a great favourite; and though I got it literally for an old song, I would not exchange it for the best beaver in Britain. I was, during several years, a kind of fac-totum servant to a country clergyman, where I picked up a good many scraps of learning, particularly in some branches of the mathematics. Whenever I feel inclined to rest myself on my way, I take my seat under a hedge, laying my poetic wallet on the one side, and my fiddle-case on the other, and placing my hat between my legs, I can by means of its brim, or rather brims, go through the whole doctrine of the Conic Sections.

However, Sir, don't let me mislead you, as if I would interest your pity. Fortune has so much forsaken me, that she has taught me to live without her; and, amid all my rags and poverty, I am as independent, and much more happy than a monarch of the world. According to the hackneyed metaphor, I value the several actors in the great drama of life, simply as they act their parts. I can look on a worthless fellow of a duke with unqualified contempt, and can regard an honest scavenger with sincere respect. As you, Sir, go through your rôle with such distinguished merit, permit me to make one in the chorus of universal applause, and assure you that with the highest respect, I have the honour to be, &c.

JOHNNY FAA.[1]

[1] This jocular epistle led, says Robert Chambers, to an intimacy between Mr. Sharpe and Burns of which all literary evidence has vanished. The only other memorial of the friendship of the two that has appeared is a masonic apron in the possession of a Whitehaven gentleman, which bears on the underside of the semicircular part when it is folded down, written in a bold fair hand:—

"CHARLES SHARPE OF HOTHAM, to RABBIE BURNS.
DUMFRIES, Dec. 12, 1791."

"Johnny Faa," we may add, is a well-known gypsy name.

TO LADY W. M. CONSTABLE.

ELLISLAND, 25th April, 1791

MY LADY,

Nothing less than the unlucky accident of having lately broken my right arm, could have prevented me the moment I received your ladyship's elegant present by Mrs. Miller,[2] from returning you my warmest and most grateful acknowledgments. I assure your ladyship, I shall set it apart; the symbols of religion shall only be more sacred. In the moment of poetic composition, the box shall be my inspiring genius. When I would breathe the comprehensive wish of benevolence for the happiness of others, I shall recollect your ladyship; when I would interest my fancy in the distresses incident to humanity, I shall remember the unfortunate Mary. I inclose your ladyship a poetic compliment I lately paid to the memory of our greatly injured, lovely Scottish Queen.[3] I have the honour to be, my lady, your ladyship's highly obliged and ever devoted servant,

R. B.

TO SIR JOHN SINCLAIR.[4]

[ELLISLAND, 1791.]

SIR,

The following circumstance has, I believe, been omitted in the Statistical Account, transmitted to you, of the parish of Dunscore, in

[2] The present was a valuable snuff-box, with a beautiful miniature of Mary Queen of Scots on the lid.

[3] This was the "Lament of Mary, Queen of Scots," vol. iii. p. 88.

[4] This letter appeared in the third volume of the first edition of the *Statistical Account of Scotland*. It was inclosed to Sir John by Mr. Riddell himself in the following letter, also printed there:—

"SIR JOHN,

"I inclose you a letter, wrote by Mr. Burns, as an addition to the account of Dunscore parish. It

Nithsdale.[1] I beg leave to send it to you, because it is new, and may be useful. How far it is deserving of a place in your patriotic publication, you are the best judge.

To store the minds of the lower classes with useful knowledge, is certainly of very great importance, both to them as individuals, and to society at large. Giving them a turn for reading and reflection, is giving them a source of innocent and laudable amusement; and besides, raises them to a more dignified degree in the scale of rationality. Impressed with this idea, a gentleman in this parish, Robert Riddell, Esq. of Glenriddell, set on foot a species of circulating library, on a plan so simple as to be practicable in any corner of the country; and so useful, as to deserve the notice of every country gentleman, who thinks the improvement of that part of his own species whom chance has thrown into the humble walks of the peasant and the artizan, a matter worthy of his attention.

Mr. Riddell got a number of his own tenants, and farming neighbours, to form themselves into a society for the purpose of having a library among themselves. They entered into a legal engagement to abide by it for three years; with a saving clause or two, in case of removal to a distance, or of death. Each member, at his entry, paid five shillings; and at each of their meetings, which were held every fourth Saturday, sixpence more. With their entry-money, and the credit which they took on the faith of their future funds, they laid in a tolerable stock of books at the commencement. What authors they were to purchase, was always decided by the majority. At every meeting, all the books, under certain fines and forfeitures, by way of penalty, were to be produced; and the members had their choice of the volumes in rotation. He whose name stood for that night, first on the list, had his choice of what volume he pleased in the whole collection; the second had his choice after the first; the third after the second, and so on to the last. At next meeting he who had been first on the list at the preceding meeting, was last at this; he who had been second was first; and so on through the whole three years. At the expiration of the engagement, the books were sold by auction, but only among the members themselves; and each man had his share of the common stock, in money or in books, as he chose to be a purchaser or not.

At the breaking up of this little society which was formed under Mr. Riddell's patronage, what with benefactions of books from him, and what with their own purchases, they had collected together upwards of one hundred and fifty volumes. It will easily be guessed, that a good deal of trash would be bought. Among the books, however, of this little library, were Blair's *Sermons*, Robertson's *History of Scotland*, Hume's *History of the Stuarts*, *The Spectator, Idler, Adventurer, Mirror, Lounger, Observer, Man of Feeling, Man of the World, Chrysal, Don Quixote, Joseph Andrews*, &c. A peasant who can read, and enjoy such books, is certainly a much superior being to his neighbour, who perhaps stalks beside his team, very little removed, except in shape, from the brutes he drives.

Wishing your patriotic exertions their so much merited success, I am, Sir, your humble servant,

A Peasant

TO ——

Ellisland, 1791.

Dear Sir,

I am exceedingly to blame in not writing you long ago; but the truth is, that I am the most indolent of all human beings, and when I matriculate in the herald's office, I intend

contains an account of a small library, which he was so good (at my desire) as to set on foot, in the barony of Monkland, or Friar's Carse, in this parish. As its utility has been felt, particularly among the younger class of people, I think, that if a similar plan were established in the different parishes of Scotland, it would tend greatly to the speedy improvement of the tenantry, trades-people, and work-people. Mr. Burns was so good as take the whole charge of this small concern. He was treasurer, librarian, and censor to this little society, who will long have a grateful sense of his public spirit and exertions for their improvement and information. I have the honour to be, Sir John, yours most sincerely,

"Robert Riddell."

[1] Mr. Kirkpatrick, the clergyman, whose duty it was to send an account of his parish to Sir John Sinclair, it is said, omitted to notice this library scheme for the diffusion of useful information, because it included some books of which he could not approve.

that my supporters shall be two sloths, my crest a slow-worm, and the motto, "De'il tak' the foremost." So much by way of apology for not thanking you sooner for your kind execution of my commission.

I would have sent you the poem;[1] but somehow or other it found its way into the public papers, where you must have seen it. I am ever, dear Sir, yours sincerely,

R. B.

TO ———.[2]

ELLISLAND, 1791.

Thou eunuch of language: thou Englishman, who never was south the Tweed: thou servile echo of fashionable barbarisms: thou quack, vending the nostrums of empirical elocution: thou marriage-maker between vowels and consonants, on the Gretna-green of caprice: thou cobbler, botching the flimsy socks of bombast oratory: thou blacksmith, hammering the rivets of absurdity: thou butcher, embruing thy hands in the bowels of orthography: thou arch-heretic in pronunciation: thou pitch-pipe of affected emphasis: thou carpenter, mortising the awkward joints of jarring sentences: thou squeaking dissonance of cadence: thou pimp of gender: thou Lyon Herald to silly etymology: thou antipode of grammar: thou executioner of construction: thou brood of the speech-distracting builders of the Tower of Babel: thou lingual confusion worse confounded: thou scape-gallows from the land of syntax: thou scavenger of mood and tense: thou murderous accoucheur of infant learning: thou *ignis fatuus*, misleading the steps of benighted ignorance: thou pickle-herring in the puppet-show of nonsense: thou faithful recorder of barbarous idiom: thou persecutor of syllabication: thou baleful meteor, foretelling and facilitating the rapid approach of Nox and Erebus.

R. B.

[1] Viz. "The Lament of Mary, Queen of Scots."

[2] This strange letter has for long been supposed to have been addressed to some one who had taken him to task about his rhymes and grammar, but Gilfillan shrewdly suggests that it was addressed to Burns's friend William Nicol of the Edinburgh High School. The language is not that of a man in downright wrathful earnest. The letter was first published in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, August, 1832, without date or signature. The original MS. was in the possession of a grandson of W. Cruickshank, one of the poet's correspondents, and a fellow-teacher of Nicol.

TO MR. JOHN SOMERVILLE, WRITER, EDINBURGH.

ELLISLAND, NEAR DUMFRIES, 11th May, 1791.

Allow me, my dear Sir, to introduce a Mr. Lorimer,[3] a particular friend of mine, to your acquaintance, as a gentleman worth your knowing, both as a man, and (what is case in point), as a man of property and consequence), who goes to town just now, to advise with, and employ an Agent in some law business. By way of serving him I put him in the best hands when I introduce him to Mr. Somerville. My kindest compliments to Mrs. Somerville, little Harry, and all your little folks. By the way about ten months ago I collected . . . a little fellow,[4] whom for strength, size, figure, and pitch of note, I will match against any boy in Nithsdale, Annandale, or any dale whatever. . . . Yours,

R. B.

[3] William Lorimer, farmer, Kemmis-hall, near Dumfries, the father of "Chloris," who was the heroine of some of the poet's finest songs.

[4] William Nicol Burns, born 9th April, 1791. Ten days before this a daughter was born to Burns by Anne Park of the Globe Inn, Dumfries. The two children were nursed together by Mrs. Burns.

TO MR. ALEX. FINDLATER, SUPERVISOR OF EXCISE.

[ELLISLAND, June, 1791.]

DEAR SIR,

I am both much surprised and vexed at that accident of Lorimer's stock. The last survey I made prior to Mr. Lorimer's going to Edinburgh, I was very particular in my inspection, and the quantity was certainly in his possession, as I stated it. The surveys I made during his absence might as well have been marked "Key absent," as I never found anybody but the lady, who I know is not mistress of keys, &c., to know anything of it, and one of the times it would have rejoiced all Hell to have seen her so drunk. I have not surveyed there

since his return. I know the gentleman's ways are, like the grace of G—, past all comprehension; but I shall give the house a severe scrutiny to-morrow morning, and send you in the naked facts.

I know, Sir, and regret deeply that this business glances with a malign aspect on my character as an officer; but as I am really innocent in the affair, and as the gentleman is known to be an illicit Dealer, and particularly as this is the *single* instance of the least shadow of carelessness or impropriety in my conduct as an officer, I shall be peculiarly unfortunate if my character shall fall a sacrifice to the dark manœuvres of a smuggler.[1] I am, Sir, your obliged and obedient humble servant,

R. B.

Sunday even.

I send you some rhymes I have just finished which tickle my fancy a little.

TO MR. ALEX. CUNNINGHAM.

11th June, 1791.

Let me interest you, my dear Cunningham, in behalf of the gentleman who waits on you with this. He is a Mr. Clarke, of Moffat, principal schoolmaster there, and is at present suffering severely under the persecution of one or two powerful individuals of his employers. He is accused of harshness to some perverse dunces that were placed under his care. God help the teacher, if a man of sensibility and genius, for such is my friend Clarke, when a blockhead father presents him with his booby son, and insists on having the rays of science lighted up in a fellow's head whose skull is impervious and inaccessible by any other way than a positive fracture with a cudgel: a fellow whom, in fact, it savours of impiety to attempt making a scholar of, as he has been marked a blockhead in the book of fate, at the Almighty fiat of his Creator.

The patrons of Moffat-school are, the ministers, magistrates, and town-council of Edinburgh, and as the business comes now before them, let me beg my dearest friend to do every thing in his power to serve the interests of a man of genius and worth, and a man whom I particularly respect and esteem. You know some good fellows among the magistracy and council, though, God knows, 'tis very often a very unfit soil for good-fellowship to flourish in, but particularly you have much to say with a reverend gentleman to whom you have the honour of being very nearly related, and whom this country and age have had the honour to produce.[2] I need not name the historian of Charles V. I tell him through the medium of his nephew's influence, that Mr. Clarke is a gentleman who will not disgrace even his patronization. I know the merits of the cause thoroughly, and I say it, that my friend is falling a sacrifice to prejudiced ignorance, and envious, callous malice.

God help the children of dependence! Hated and persecuted by their enemies, and too often, alas! almost unexceptionally, received by their friends with insulting disrespect and heart-stinging reproach, under the thin disguise of cold civility and humiliating advice. O! to be a sturdy savage, stalking in the pride of his independence, amid the solitary wilds of his deserts, rather than in civilized life, helplessly to tremble for a subsistence, precarious as the caprice of a fellow-creature! Every man has his virtues, and no man is without his failings; and curse on that privileged plain-dealing of friendship, which, in the hour of my calamity, cannot reach forth the helping hand, without, at the same time, pointing out those failings, and assigning their share in my present distress. My friends, for such the world calls ye, and such ye think yourselves to be, pass by my virtues if you please, but do, also, spare my follies: the first will witness in my breast for themselves, and the last will give pain enough to the ingenuous mind without you. And since deviating more or less from the paths of propriety and rectitude must be incident to human nature, do thou, Fortune,

[1] On reading the above and the preceding letter our faith is somewhat shaken as to Burns's straightforwardness. We cannot understand how he should recommend Lorimer to Somerville as a "gentleman worth your knowing," and then turn round and write of him and his wife as he does to Findlater. When we know too, that Burns, the excise officer, kept on intimate visiting terms with an "illicit dealer" for at least four years longer, we cannot help thinking that his conduct was somewhat questionable, to say the least of it.

[2] Mr. Cunningham was nephew to Dr. Robertson the historian.

put it in my power, always from myself, and of myself, to bear the consequence of those errors! I do not want to be independent that I may sin, but I want to be independent in my sinning.

To return in this rambling letter to the subject I set out with, let me recommend my friend, Mr. Clarke, to your acquaintance and good offices; his worth entitles him to the one, and his gratitude will merit the other. I long much to hear from you. Adieu!

R. B.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM MOODIE,

EDINBURGH.[1]

[ELLISLAND, June, 1791.]

REV. AND DEAR SIR,

This will be presented to you by a particular friend of mine, a Mr. Clarke, schoolmaster in Moffat, who has lately become the unfortunate and undeserved subject of persecution from some of his employers. The ostensible and assigned reason on their part is some instances of severity to the boys under his care; but I have had the best means of knowing the merits of the case, and I assure you, Sir, that he is falling a sacrifice to the weakness of the many, following in the cry of the villainy of the few.

The business will now come before the patrons of the school, who are the ministers, magistrates, and town council of Edinburgh; and in that view I would interest your goodness in his behalf. 'Tis true, Sir, and I feel the full force of the observation, that a man in my powerless, humble situation very much mistakes himself, and very much mistakes the way of the world when he dares presume to offer influence among so highly respectable a body as the patronage I have mentioned. On that—what could I do? A man of abilities, a man of genius, a man of worth, and my friend—before I would stand quietly and silent by, and see him perish thus, I would go down on my knees to the rocks and mountains, and implore them to fall on his persecutors, and crush their malice and them in deserved destruction. Believe me, Sir, he is a greatly injured man.

The humblest individual, though, alas, he cannot so redress the wrong, may yet as ably attest the fact as a lord might do. Mr. Moodie's goodness I well know, and that acquaintance with him that I have the honour to boast of will forgive my addressing him thus in favour of a gentleman, whom if he knew so well, he would esteem as I do.

R. B.

[1] The above clergyman was appointed to St. Andrew's Church, Edinburgh, in 1787, while Burns resided in the city, and at that time the poet and minister became acquainted.

LETTER DICTATED FOR CLARKE,

ADDRESSED TO THE LORD PROVOST OF EDINBURGH.

[MOFFAT, June, 1791.]

MY LORD,

It may be deemed presumption in a man obscure and unknown as I am, and an entire stranger to your Lordship, to trouble in this manner; but when I inform you that the subject on which I address you is of the last importance to me, and is so far connected with you, that on your determination, in a great measure, my fate must depend, I rely on your Lordship's goodness that you will think any further apology unnecessary.

I have been for nearly five years Schoolmaster in Moffat; an appointment of which your Lordship will know, you with the rest of the Magistracy and Town Council, together with the Clergy of Edinburgh, have the patronage. The trust with which these, my highly respectable Patrons had honoured me, I have endeavoured to discharge with the utmost fidelity, and I hope with a good degree of success; but of late, one or two powerful individuals of my employers have been pleased to attack my reputation as a Teacher, have threatened no less than to expel me from the School, and are taking every method, some of them, I will say it, insidious and unfair to the last degree, to put their threats in execution. The fault of which I am accused is some instances of severity to the children under my care. Were I to tell your Lordship that I am innocent of the charge—that any shade of cruelty, particularly that very black one of cruelty to tender infancy, will be allowed by every unbiassed person who knows anything of me to be tints unknown in my disposition; you will certainly look on all

this *from me* as words of course; so I shall trouble you with nothing on the merits of my cause until I have a fair hearing before my Rt. Hon. Patrons. A fair hearing, my Lord, is what above all things I want; and what I greatly fear will be attempted to be denied me. It is to be insinuated that I have vacated my place, that I never was legally appointed, with I know not how many pretences more to hinder the business from coming properly before your Lordship and the other Patrons of the School —all which I deny, and will insist on holding my appointment until the dignified characters who gave it to me shall find me unworthy of it.

In your Lordship's great acquaintance with human life, you must have known and seen many instances of Innocence, nay, of Merit, disguised and obscured, and sometimes for ever buried, by the dark machinations of unprincipled Malevolence, and envious Craft; and until the contrary be made to appear, 'tis at least equally probable that my case is in that unfortunate and undeserved predicament. I have the honour to be, &c.

(Signed) JAMES CLARKE.[1]

TO JOHN MITCHELL, ESQ.

COLLECTOR OF EXCISE, DUMFRIES.

[ELLISLAND, 16th June, 1791.]

SIR,

A very pressing occasion, no less than witnessing the wedding of an only brother,[2] calls me to Ayrshire, for which I shall take your permission as granted, except I be countermanded before Sunday, the day I set out. I shall remember that three days are all that I can expect. The inclosed official paper came to my hand, and I take the liberty to lay it before you.—I have the honour to be your obliged humble servant,

R. B.

[1] This letter was transcribed into the Glenriddell volume of letters now at Liverpool, and was headed by Burns:—"The following letter, which was sent by Mr. Clarke to the Provost of Edinburgh, was of my writing."

[2] Gilbert Burns, Mossgiel, was married to Jean Breckenridge at Kilmarnock on the 21st June, 1791. See Appendix to Life, p. 168, vol. i.

TO MR. PETER HILL, BOOKSELLER,

[June, 1791.][3]

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I take Glenriddell's kind offer of a corner for a postscript to you, though I have got nothing particular to tell you. It is with the greatest pleasure I learn from all hands, and particularly from your warm friend and patron, the Laird here, that you are going on, spreading and thriving like the Palm tree that shades the fragrant vale in the Holy Land of the Prophet. May the richest juices from beneath, and the dews of heaven from above foster your root and refresh your branches, until you be as conspicuous among your fellows as the stately Goliah towering over the little pigmy Philistines around him! Amen! so be it!!!

R. B.

TO MISS DAVIES.[4]

[August, 1791.]

MADAM,

I understand my very worthy neighbour, Mr. Riddell, has informed you that I have

[3] The above was addressed in the handwriting of Captain Riddell, the date is supplied from the Dumfries postmark.

[4] "Those who remember the pleasing society which, in the year 1791, Dumfries afforded, cannot have forgotten 'the charming lovely Davies' of the lyrics of Burns. Her maiden name was Deborah, and she was the youngest daughter of Dr. Davies of Tenby in Pembrokeshire; between her and the Riddells of Friars' Carse there were ties of blood or friendship, and her eldest sister, Harriet, was married to Captain Adam Gordon, of the noble family of Kenmure. Her education was superior to that of most young ladies of her station of life; she was equally agreeable and witty; her company was much courted in Nithsdale, and others than Burns respected her talents in poetic composition. She was then in her twentieth year, and so little and so handsome, that some one, who desired to compliment her, welcomed her to the Vale of Nith as one of the Graces in miniature.

"It was the destiny of Miss Davies to become acquainted with Captain Delany, a pleasant and sightly man, who made himself acceptable to her by sympathizing in her pursuits, and by writing verses to her, calling her his 'Stella,' an ominous name, which might have brought the memory of Swift's unhappy mistress to her mind. An offer of marriage was made and accepted; but Delany's circumstances were urged as an obstacle: delays ensued; a coldness on the lover's part followed; his regiment was called abroad —he went with it; she heard from him once and no

made you the subject of some verses.[1] There is something so provoking in the idea of being the burthen of a ballad, that I do not think Job or Moses, though such patterns of patience and meekness, could have resisted the curiosity to know what that ballad was: so my worthy friend has done me a mischief, which I dare say he never intended; and reduced me to the unfortunate alternative of leaving your curiosity ungratified, or else disgusting you with foolish verses, the unfinished production of a random moment, and never meant to have met your ear. I have heard or read somewhere of a gentleman who had some genius, much eccentricity, and very considerable dexterity with his pencil. In the accidental group of life into which one is thrown, wherever this gentleman met with a character in a more than ordinary degree congenial to his heart, he used to steal a sketch of the face, merely, he said, as a *nota bene*, to point out the agreeable recollection to his memory. What this gentleman's pencil was to him, my Muse is to me; and the verses I do myself the honour to send you are a *memento* exactly of the same kind that he indulged in.

It may be more owing to the fastidiousness of my caprice than the delicacy of my taste; but I am so often tired, disgusted, and hurt with the insipidity, affectation, and pride of mankind, that when I meet with a person "after my own heart," I positively feel what an orthodox Protestant would call a species of idolatry, which acts on my fancy like inspiration; and I can no more desist rhyming on the impulse, than an Æolian harp can refuse its tones to the streaming air. A distich or two would be the consequence though the object which hit my fancy were grey-bearded age; but where my theme is youth and beauty, a young lady whose personal charms, wit, and sentiment are equally striking and unaffected—by heavens! though I had lived three score years a married man, and three score years before I was a married man, my imagination would hallow the very idea: and I am truly sorry that the inclosed stanzas have done such poor justice to such a subject.

R. B.

TO MISS DAVIES.

[August, 1791.]

It is impossible, Madam, that the generous warmth and angelic purity of your youthful mind can have any idea of that moral disease under which I unhappily must rank as the chief of sinners; I mean a torpitude of the moral powers, that may be called a lethargy of conscience.—In vain Remorse rears her horrent crest, and rouses all her snakes: beneath the deadly-fixed eye and leaden hand of Indolence, their wildest ire is charmed into the torpor of the bat, slumbering out the rigours of winter in the chink of a ruined wall. Nothing less, Madam, could have made me so long neglect your obliging commands. Indeed, I had one apology—the bagatelle was not worth presenting. Besides, so strongly am I interested in Miss Davies's fate and welfare in the serious business of life, amid its chances and changes, that to make her the subject of a silly ballad, is downright mockery of these ardent feelings: 'tis like an impertinent jest to a dying friend.[2]

Gracious Heaven! why this disparity between our wishes and our powers? Why is the most generous wish to make others blest, impotent and ineffectual—as the idle breeze that

more, and was left to mourn the change of affection—to droop and die. He perished in battle or by a foreign climate, soon after the death of the young lady of whose love he was unworthy.

"The following verses on this unfortunate attachment form part of a poem found among her papers at her death. She takes Delany's portrait from her bosom, presses it to her lips, and says,

> Next to thyself, 'tis all on earth
> Thy Stella dear doth hold,
> The glass is clouded with my breath,
> And as my bosom cold:
> That bosom which so oft has glowed
> With love and friendship's name,
> Where you the seed of love first sowed,
> That kindled into flame.
>
> You there neglected let it burn;
> It seized the vital part,
> And left my bosom as an urn
> To hold a broken heart.
> I once had thought I should have been
> A tender happy wife,
> And past my future days serene
> With thee, my James, through life.

"The information contained in this note was obligingly communicated by H. P. Davies, Esq., nephew of the lady."—CUNNINGHAM.

[1] See the song "Lovely Davies," p. 97, vol. iii.

[2] See note to song "Bonnie wee thing," vol. iii. p. 98.

crosses the pathless desert? In my walks of life I have met with a few people to whom how gladly would I have said—"Go, be happy! I know that your hearts have been wounded by the scorn of the proud, whom accident has placed above you—or worse still, in whose hands are, perhaps, placed many of the comforts of your life. But there! ascend that rock, Independence, and look justly down on their littleness of soul. Make the worthless tremble under your indignation, and the foolish sink before your contempt; and largely impart that happiness to others which, I am certain, will give yourselves so much pleasure to bestow."

Why, dear Madam, must I wake from this delightful reverie, and find it all a dream? Why, amid my generous enthusiasm, must I find myself poor and powerless, incapable of wiping one tear from the eye of pity, or of adding one comfort to the friend I love!—Out upon the world! say I, that its affairs are administered so ill! They talk of reform;—good Heaven! what a reform would I make among the sons, and even the daughters of men!—Down, immediately, should go fools from the high places where misbegotten chance has perked them up, and through life should they skulk, ever haunted by their native insignificance, as the body marches accompanied by its shadow.—As for a much more formidable class, the knaves, I am at a loss what to do with them: had I a world, there should not be a knave in it. . . . But the hand that could give, I would liberally fill: and I would pour delight on the heart that could kindly forgive, and generously love.

Still the inequalities of life are, among men, comparatively tolerable—but there is a delicacy, a tenderness, accompanying every view in which we can place lovely Woman, that are grated and shocked at the rude, capricious distinctions of Fortune. Woman is the blood-royal of life: let there be slight degrees of precedency among them—but let them be ALL sacred.—Whether this last sentiment be right or wrong, I am not accountable: it is an original component feature of my mind. . . .

R. B.

TO MR. THOMAS SLOAN.

CARE OF WM. KENNEDY, ESQ., MANCHESTER.

ELLISLAND, Sept. 1st, 1791.

MY DEAR SLOAN,

Suspense is worse than disappointment; for that reason I hurry to tell you that I just now learn that Mr. Ballantine does not choose to interfere more in the business. I am truly sorry for it, but cannot help it.

You blame me for not writing you sooner, but you will please to recollect that you omitted one little necessary piece of information—your address.

However you know equally well, my hurried life, indolent temper, and strength of attachment. It must be a longer period than the longest life "in the world's hale and undegenerate days," that will make me forget so dear a friend as Mr. Sloan. I am prodigal enough at times, but I will not part with such a treasure as that.

I can easily enter into the *embarras* of your present situation. You know my favourite quotation from Young—

> On Reason build RESOLVE!
> That column of true majesty in man.—

And that other favourite one from Thomson's "Alfred"—

> What proves the hero truly GREAT,
> Is, never, never to despair.

Or, shall I quote you an author of your acquaintance?

> Whether DOING, SUFFERING, or FORBEARING,
> You may do miracles by—PERSEVERING.

I have nothing new to tell you. The few friends we have are going on in the old way. I sold my crop on this day se'enight, and sold it very well.[1] A guinea an acre, on an average, above value. But such a scene of drunkenness was hardly ever seen in this country. After the roup was over, about thirty people engaged in a battle, every man for his own hand, and fought it out for three hours. Nor was the scene much better in the house. No fighting, indeed, but folks lying drunk on the

[1] The poet had by this time made up his mind to give up farming, and his crop was sold preparatory to his leaving Ellisland.

floor, and decanting, until both my dogs got so drunk by attending them, that they could not stand. You will easily guess how I enjoyed the scene; as I was no farther over than you used to see me.

Mrs. B. and family have been in Ayrshire these many weeks.

Farewell! and God bless you, my dear friend!

R. B.

TO THE EARL OF BUCHAN.

ELLISLAND, [September,] 1791.

MY LORD,

Language sinks under the ardour of my feelings when I would thank your lordship for the honour you have done me in inviting me to make one at the coronation of the bust of Thomson.[1] In my first enthusiasm in reading the card you did me the honour to write me, I overlooked every obstacle, and determined to go; but I fear it will not be in my power. A week or two's absence in the very middle of my harvest is what I much doubt I dare not venture on. I once already made a pilgrimage *up* the whole course of the Tweed, and fondly would I take the same delightful journey *down* the windings of that delightful stream.

Your lordship hints at an ode for the occasion: but who would write after Collins? I read over his verses to the memory of Thomson, and despaired. I got indeed to the length of three or four stanzas, in the way of address to the shade of the bard, on crowning his bust. I shall trouble your lordship with the subjoined copy of them,[2] which, I am afraid, will be but too convincing a proof how unequal I am to the task. However, it affords me an opportunity of approaching your lordship, and declaring how sincerely and gratefully I have the honour to be, &c.[3]

R. B.

[1] The invitation was couched in the following terms:—

"DRYBURGH ABBEY, June 17th, 1791.

"Lord Buchan has the pleasure to invite Mr. Burns to make one at the coronation of the bust of Thomson, on Ednam Hill, on the 22nd of September [O.S.]; for which day perhaps his muse may inspire an ode suited to the occasion. Suppose Mr. Burns should, leaving the Nith, go across the country, and meet the Tweed at the nearest point from his farm—and, wandering along the pastoral banks of Thomson's pure parent stream, catch inspiration on the devious walk, till he finds Lord Buchan sitting on the ruins of Dryburgh. There the Commendator [the earl himself, as being proprietor of the place] will give him a hearty welcome, and try to light his lamp at the pure flame of native genius, upon the altar of Caledonian virtue. This poetical perambulation of the Tweed is a thought of the late Sir Gilbert Elliot, and of Lord Minto, followed out by his accomplished grandson, the present Sir Gilbert, who having been with Lord Buchan lately, the project was renewed, and will, they hope, be executed in the manner proposed."

A LETTER FOR MR. CLARKE

TO SEND TO MR. WILLIAMSON, FACTOTUM AND FAVOURITE TO THE EARL OF HOPETOUN.

[September, 1791.]

SIR,

Most sincerely do I regret that concurrence of accident, prejudice and mistake, which, most unfortunately for me, has subjected me, as Master of Moffat Grammar School, to the displeasure of the Earl of Hopetoun, and those in whom he places confidence. Protestations of my innocence will, from me, be thought words of course. But I hope, and I think I have some well-grounded reasons for that hope, that the gentlemen in whose hands I immediately am, the Right Hon. Patrons of the School, will find the charge against me groundless, and my claims just; and will not allow me to fall a sacrifice to the insidious designs of some, and the well-meant, though misinformed zeal of others. However, as disputes and litigations must be of great hurt, both to the School and me, I most ardently wish that it would suggest itself to Mr. Williamson's good sense,

[2] See "Address to the Shade of Thomson," vol. iii. page 111.

[3] The earl replied to the above on the 16th Sept., informing the poet that his "Address" had been well received by the public, and suggesting "Harvest Home" as a subject for future poetic consideration. His lordship recommends his correspondent to write in English rather than in a "dialect which admits of no elegance or dignity of expression." He further adds, "such a subject would furnish you with an amiable opportunity of perpetuating the names of Glencairn, Miller, and your other eminent benefactors; which, from what I know of your spirit, and have seen of your poems and letters, will not deviate from the chastity of praise that it is so uniformly united to true taste and genius," &c.

and wish for the welfare of the country, the propriety of dropping all disputes, and allowing me peaceable admission to my school and the exercise of my function. This, Sir, I am persuaded will be serving all parties; and will lay me under particular and lasting obligations to your goodness. I propose opening School to-morrow; and the quiet possession of my school-house is what I have to request of you—a request, which, if refused, I must be under the very disagreeable necessity of asking in the way pointed out by the laws of the country. Whatever, Sir, you may think of other parts of my conduct, you will at least grant the propriety of a man's straining every nerve in a contest, where not only Ruin but Infamy must attend his defeat.[1] I am, &c. (Signed.)

JAMES CLARKE.

TO JAMES GRACIE, ESQ., BANKER.

GLOBE INN [DUMFRIES], 8 o'clock p.m. [1791].

SIR,

I have yours anent Crombie's[2] bill. Your forbearance has been very great. I did it to accommodate the thoughtless fellow. He asks till Wednesday week. If he fail, I pay it myself. In the meantime if horning and caption[3] be absolutely necessary, grip him by the neck and welcome. Yours,

R. B.

TO COLONEL FULLARTON,[4]

OF FULLARTON.

ELLISLAND, October 3d, 1791.

SIR,

I have just this moment got the frank, and next minute must send it to post, else I proposed to have sent you two or three other bagatelles that might have amused a vacant hour, about as well as "Six excellent new songs," or the "Aberdeen prognostications for the year to come." I shall probably trouble you soon with another packet, about the gloomy month of November, when the people of England hang and drown themselves—anything generally is better than one's own thoughts.

Fond as I may be of my own productions, it is not for their sake that I am so anxious to send you them. I am ambitious, covetously ambitious, of being known to a gentleman, whom I am proud to call my countryman;[5] a gentleman who was a Foreign Ambassador as soon as he was a man; and a Leader of Armies as soon as he was a soldier; and that with an *éclat* unknown to the usual minions of a Court, men who, with all the adventitious advantages of Princely connections, and Princely Fortune, must yet, like the caterpillar, labour a whole life-time before they reach the wished-for height, there to roost a stupid chrysalis, and doze out the remaining glimmering existence of old age.

If the gentleman that accompanied you when you did me the honour of calling on me, is with you, I beg to be respectfully remembered to him. I have the honour to be, your highly obliged and most devoted humble servant,

R. B.

TO ROBERT GRAHAM, ESQ.

OF FINTRY.

ELLISLAND, Oct. 5, 1791.

I ought to have written you long ago; but a mere letter of thanks must to you be an insipid business. I wish to send you something that will give you at least as much amusement as the "Aberdeen New Prognosticator," or "Six Excellent New Songs." Along with two other pieces, I enclose you a sheetful of groans,[6] wrung from me in my elbow-chair, with one

[1] The result of this affair will be seen further on.

[2] The mason at Dalswinton who had been employed in building the poet's house at Ellisland, and had been already paid for his work.

[3] *Horning* and *caption*.—Scots law terms which may be briefly described, the former as a writ commanding a debtor to pay his creditor his just and lawful debt within a given time on pain of imprisonment; the latter a warrant of apprehension in case the debt has not been duly paid.

[4] Colonel Fullarton, it will be remembered, is honourably mentioned in the "Vision." This letter was addressed to him when resident in England. It first appeared in the *Paisley Magazine*, 1828.

[5] Meaning, belonging to the same district, Ayrshire.

[6] The poetical epistle commencing:—

Late crippl'd of an arm, and now a leg.

See vol. iii. p. 116.

unlucky leg on a stool before me. I will make no apology for addressing it to you; I have no longer a choice of patrons; the truly noble Glencairn is no more! I intend soon to do myself the honour of writing Mrs. Graham, and sending her some other lesser pieces of late date. My Muse will sooner be in mischief than be idle; so I keep her at work.

I thought to have mentioned some Excise ideas that your late goodness has put into my head; but it is so like the sorning impudence of a sturdy beggar, that I cannot do it. It was something in the way of an officiating job. With the most ardent wish that you may be rewarded by *Him* who can do it, for your generous patronage to a man who, though feeling highly sensible of it, is quite unable to repay it.—I have the honour to be, &c.

R. B.

TO MR. CORBET,

SUPERVISOR-GENERAL OF EXCISE.

[October, 1791.]

SIR,

I have in my time taken up the pen on several ticklish subjects, but none that ever cost me half so much as the language of supplication. To lay open one's wants and woes to the mercy of another's benevolence is a business so prostituted by the worthless and unfeeling, that a man of principle and delicacy shrinks from it as from contamination.

Mr. Findlater tells me that you wish to know from myself what are my views in desiring to exchange my Excise division. With the wish natural to man of bettering his present situation, I have turned my thoughts toward the practicability of getting into a port division. As I know that the general supervisors are omnipotent in these matters, my honoured friend Mrs. Dunlop of Dunlop offered me to interest you in my behalf.

She told me that she was well acquainted with Mrs. Corbet's goodness, and that, on the score of former intimacy, she thought she could promise some influence with her, and added, with her usual sagacity and knowledge of human nature, that the surest road to the good offices of a man was through the mediation of the woman he loved. On this footing, Sir, I venture my application, else not even the known generosity of your character would have emboldened me to address you thus.—I have the honour to be, &c.

R. B.

TO MR. PETER HILL, BOOKSELLER.

ELLISLAND, Oct. 1791.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I was never more unfit for writing. A poor devil, nailed to an elbow-chair, writhing in anguish with a bruised leg[1] laid on a stool before him, is in a fine situation truly for saying bright things.

I may perhaps see you about Martinmas. I have sold to my landlord the lease of my farm, and as I roup off everything then, I have a mind to take a week's excursion to see old acquaintance. At all events you may reckon on [payment of] your account about that time. So much for business. I do not know if I ever informed you that I am now ranked on the list as a supervisor, and I have pretty good reason to believe that I shall soon be called out to employment. The appointment is worth from one to two hundred a year according to the place of the country in which one is settled. I have not been so lucky in my farming. Mr. Miller's kindness has just been such another as Creech's was—but this for your private ear:

> His meddling vanity, a busy fiend,
> Still making work his selfish craft must mend.[2]

By the way I have taken a damned vengeance of Creech. He wrote me a fine, fair letter, telling me that he was going to print a third edition; and as he had a brother's care of my fame, he wished to add every new thing I had written since, and I should be amply rewarded with—a copy or two to present to my friends! He has sent me a copy of the last edition to correct, &c., but I have as yet taken no notice

[1] The poet had got his leg hurt by a fall from or with his horse.

[2] Burns here speaks in unjust terms of his landlord Mr. Miller, who was in no way to blame for the poet's failure to farm successfully, and whose "selfish craft" existed only in the poet's splenetic mind. Although his rent for Ellisland was only £50, the farm has since been let at £170.

of it; and I hear that he has published without me.[1] You know, and all my friends know, that I do not value money; but I owed the gentleman a debt, which I am happy to have it in my power to repay.

Farewell, and prosperity attend all your undertakings! I shall try if my unlucky limb would give me a little ease, to write you a letter a little better worth reading. Put the enclosed to post.

R. B.

TO ROBERT AINSLIE, ESQ.,

EDINBURGH.

DUMFRIES, Nov. 1791.[2]

MY DEAR AINSLIE,

Can you minister to a mind diseased? Can you, amid the horrors of penitence, regret, remorse, head-ache, nausea, and all the rest of the damned hounds of hell, that beset a poor wretch who has been guilty of the sin of drunkenness—can you speak peace to a troubled soul?

Misérable perdu that I am, I have tried every thing that used to amuse me, but in vain: here must I sit, a monument of the vengeance laid up in store for the wicked, slowly counting every chick of the clock as it slowly, slowly, numbers over these lazy scoundrels of hours, who, damn them, are ranked up before me, every one at his neighbour's backside, and every one with a burthen of anguish on his back, to pour on my devoted head—and there is none to pity me. My wife scolds me, my business torments me, and my sins come staring me in the face, every one telling a more bitter tale than his fellow.[3]—When I tell you . . . you will guess something of my hell within, and all around me.—I began "Elibanks and Elibraes," but the stanzas fell unenjoyed and unfinished from my listless tongue: at last I luckily thought of reading over an old letter of yours, that lay by me in my book-case, and I felt something, for the first time since I opened my eyes, of pleasurable existence.——Well—I begin to breathe a little, since I began to write to you. How are you, and what are you doing? How goes Law? Apropos, for connexion's sake, do not address me as "Supervisor," for that is an honour I cannot pretend to—I am on the list, as we call it, for a supervisor, and will be called out by and bye to act as one; but at present, I am a simple Gauger, tho' t'other day I got an appointment to an excise division of £25 *per annum* better than the rest. My present income, down money, is £70 *per annum*. . . .

I have one or two good fellows here whom you would be glad to know. . . .

R. B.

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

[DUMFRIES, 17th Dec. 1791.]

Many thanks to you, Madam, for your good news respecting the little floweret and the mother-plant. I hope my poetic prayers have been heard, and will be answered up to the warmest sincerity of their fullest extent; and then Mrs. Henri will find her little darling the representative of his late parent, in every thing but his abridged existence.

I have just finished the following song, which, to a lady, the descendant of Wallace, and many heroes of his truly illustrious line—and herself the mother of several soldiers, needs neither preface nor apology.

[1] In July, 1790, Creech issued a reprint of the one-volume Edinburgh edition. In Sept. 1791, Mr. Davies (of Cadell and Davies, the London publishers) thus writes to Creech: "Mr. Cadell says he believes he wrote you about the new edition of Burns's poems; but in case he has not, he bids me tell you, Sir, that he recommends 1000 to be printed in two vols. crown 8vo, on a fine wove paper, and that in two or three months, in time for his sale." It was not till 1792 that Burns consented to co-operate with Creech in the matter, and in April, 1793, a two-volume edition, post 8vo, containing some twenty new pieces, was published in London and Edinburgh.

[2] Burns left Ellisland for Dumfries at or immediately after Martinmas, 1791, having sold off all his stock and effects at good prices, intending for the future to rely on the excise alone, and hoping soon to be appointed to the comparatively well-paid post of supervisor.

[3] Mr. Scott Douglas suggests that these "penitential horrors" were partly called up by a letter from Clarinda to the poet, written on behalf of a certain Jenny Clow, the mother of an illegitimate child of his, and at present ill and starving in Edinburgh. See the Clarinda Correspondence.

SCENE—*A field of battle; time of the day—evening; the wounded and dying of the victorious army are supposed to join in the following*

SONG OF DEATH.

Farewell, thou fair day, thou green earth and ye skies,
Now gay with the bright setting sun!
Farewell, loves and friendships, ye dear tender ties!
Our race of existence is run![1]

The circumstance that gave rise to the foregoing verses was—looking over, with a musical friend, M'Donald's Collection of Highland airs, I was struck with one, an Isle of Skye tune, entitled "Oran an Aoig," or, the Song of Death, to the measure of which I have adapted my stanzas. I have of late composed two or three other little pieces, which, ere yon full-orbed moon, whose broad impudent face now stares at old Mother Earth all night, shall have shrunk into a modest crescent, just peeping forth at dewy dawn, I shall find an hour to transcribe for you. *A Dieu je vous commende.*

R. B.

TO MR. JAMES CLARKE,

SCHOOLMASTER, MOFFAT.

DUMFRIES, 10th January, 1792.

I received yours this moment, my dear Sir. I sup with Captain Riddell in town to-night, else I had gone to Carse directly. *Courage, mon ami!* The day may, after all, be yours; but at any rate, there is other air to breathe than that of Moffat, pestiferously tainted as it is with the breath of that arch-rascal J. —. There are two quotations from two poets which, in situations such as yours, were congenial to my soul. Thomson says:—

What proves the hero truly great—
Is never, never to despair.

And Dr. Young:—

On Reason build Resolve,
That column of true Majesty in man.

To-morrow you shall know the result of my consultation with Captain Riddell. Yours,

R. B.

[1] See vol. iii. page 118.

TO MR. WILLIAM SMELLIE,

PRINTER.[2]

DUMFRIES, 22d Jan. 1792.

I sit down, my dear Sir, to introduce a young lady to you, and a lady in the first ranks of fashion, too. What a task! to you—who care no more for the herd of animals called young ladies, than you do for the herd of animals called young gentlemen. To you—who despise and detest the gropings and combinations of fashion, as an idiot painter that seems industrious to place staring fools and unprincipled knaves in the foreground of his picture, while men of sense and honesty are too often thrown in the dimmest shades. Mrs. Riddell,[3] who will take this letter to town with her, and send it to you, is a character that, even in your own way, as a naturalist and a philosopher, would be an acquisition to your acquaintance. The lady, too, is a votary to the muses; and as I think myself somewhat of a judge in my own trade, I assure you that her verses, always correct, and often elegant, are much beyond the common run of the *lady poetesses* of the day. She is a great admirer of your book;[4] and, hearing me say that I was acquainted with you, she begged to be known to you, as she is just going to pay her

[2] See Epigram and note, p. 201, vol. ii.

[3] Mrs. Walter Riddell of Woodley Park, near Dumfries, wife of the brother of Burns's Ellisland neighbour, Robert Riddell, Esq., of Friars' Carse. We have already in more than one note had occasion to allude to this lady and her relations to the poet, especially in connection with poems of which she was the subject. She belonged to the West Indies (her husband had an estate in Antigua), and she had visited and spent some time in the Leeward Islands and Madeira, where she made some scientific observations and notes on natural history. These materials she had now arranged with the intention of having them published. Having learned that Smellie was the printer of Burns's Edinburgh edition, she applied to the bard for a letter of introduction to the scientific, but rather bluff and rough spoken printer, which application resulted in the penning of the above lively epistle. Mrs. Riddell's book is thus announced among the new books in the *Scots Magazine* for Nov. 1792:—*Voyages to the Madeira and Leeward Caribbee Islands; with Sketches of the Natural History of those Islands.* By Maria R—. 12 mo., 2*s.* 6*d.* sewed. Edinburgh, printed for Hill, and Cadell, London. See note to letter of Burns to this lady, November, 1792.

[4] Viz. *The Philosophy of Natural History.*

first visit to our Caledonian capital. I told her that her best way was, to desire her near relation, and your intimate friend, Craigdarroch, to have you at his house while she was there; and lest you might think of a lively West Indian girl of eighteen, as girls of eighteen too often deserve to be thought of, I should take care to remove that prejudice. To be impartial, however, in appreciating the lady's merits, she has one unlucky failing: a failing which you will easily discover, as she seems rather pleased with indulging in it; and a failing that you will easily pardon, as it is a sin which very much besets yourself;—where she dislikes, or despises, she is apt to make no more a secret of it, than where she esteems and respects.

I will not present you with the unmeaning *compliments of the season*, but I will send you my warmest wishes and most ardent prayers, that FORTUNE may never throw your SUBSISTENCE to the mercy of a KNAVE, or set your CHARACTER on the judgment of a FOOL; but that, upright and erect, you may walk to an honest grave, where men of letters shall say, "Here lies a man who did honour to science," and men of worth shall say, "Here lies a man who did honour to human nature."

R. B.

TO ALEX. CUNNINGHAM, ESQ.

WRITER, EDINBURGH.

DUMFRIES, 5th February, 1792.

MY DEAR CUNNINGHAM,

To-morrow or some day soon I will write you as entertaining a letter as I can; in the meantime take a scrawl of very serious business. You remember Mr. Clarke, Master of the Grammar School at Moffat, whom I formerly recommended to your good offices; the crisis of his fate is just at hand. Mr. M'Murdo of Drumlanrig, Ferguson of Craigdarroch, and Riddell of Glenriddell, gentlemen who know Clarke personally and intimately, have strained, and are straining every nerve to serve him; but alas! poor Clarke's foes are mighty. Lord Hopetoun, spurred on by those infernal creatures that always go between a great Man and his inferiors, has sworn his destruction; irritated as he justly is that any Plebeian, and the son of a Plebeian, should dare to oppose *existence*—a trifling affair, against his Lordship's high and mighty will. What I know, and *you* know that I would do for a friend of yours, I ask of you for a friend, a much esteemed friend of mine. Get the Principal's[1] interest in his favour. Be not denied! To interpose between lordly cruelty and helpless merit is a task worthy of you to ask, and him to execute. In the meantime if you meet with Craigdarroch, or chance to wait on him (by the bye, I wish you would mention this very business), he will inform you of the great merits of one party, and the demerits of the other.

You shall hear from me soon. God bless you!

R. B.

TO MR. PETER HILL,

BOOKSELLER, EDINBURGH.

DUMFRIES, Feb. 5th, 1792.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I send you by the bearer, (Mr. Clarke, a particular friend of mine), six pounds and a shilling, which you will dispose of as follows:—Five pounds ten shillings, per account, I owe Mr. R. Burn, architect, for erecting the stone over the grave of poor Fergusson. He was two years in erecting it, after I had commissioned him for it; and I have been two years in paying him, after he sent me his account; so he and I are quits. He had the *hardiesse* to ask me interest on the sum; but, considering that the money was due by one Poet for putting a tomb-stone over the grave of another, he may, with grateful surprise, thank Heaven that ever he saw a farthing of it.

With the remainder of the money pay yourself for the *Office of a Messenger*, that I bought of you; and send me by Mr. Clarke a note of its price. Send me, likewise, the fifth volume of the *Observer*, by Mr. Clarke; and if any money remain let it stand to account.

My best compliments to Mrs. Hill. I sent you a maukin [hare] by last week's fly, which I hope you received. Yours most sincerely,

R. B.

[1] Principal Robertson, the historian, was Cunningham's uncle.

TO MR. JAMES CLARKE,

SCHOOLMASTER, MOFFAT.

DUMFRIES, 17th February, 1792.

MY DEAR SIR,

If this finds you at Moffat, or as soon as it finds you at Moffat, you must without delay wait on Mr. Riddell, as he has been very kindly thinking of you in an affair that has occurred of a clerk's place in Manchester, which if your hopes are desperate in your present business, he proposes procuring for you. I know your gratitude for past, as well as hopes of future, favours will induce you to pay every attention to Glenriddell's wishes; as he is almost the only, and undoubtedly the best friend that your unlucky fate has left you.

Apropos, I just now hear that you have beat your foes, *every tail hollow*. Huzza! *Io triumphe!*[1] Mr. Riddell, who is at my elbow, says that if it is so, he begs that you will wait on him directly, and I know you are too good a man not to pay your respects to your saviour. Yours,

R. B.

TO J. LEVEN, ESQ.,

GEN. SUPERVISOR, EXCISE OFFICE, EDINBURGH.

[March, 1792.]

SIR,

I have sealed and secured Lawson's Tea, but no permit has yet appeared, nor can it appear before Tuesday at the nearest; so there is the greater chance of the condemnation. I shrewdly suspect the Newcastle house, Rankine and Sons, is the firm; they will think that the goods being regularly delivered to a Carrier, with proper permit, will exonerate them as to further responsibility; and Lawson, on his part, is determined not to have any thing to do with it, so our process may be the easier managed.

The moment that the permits arrive, as I am pretty certain they will, I shall inform you; but in the meantime, when the three remaining boxes arrive, as they cannot, *in quality*, correspond with the permit, and besides, will be at least beyond the limited time a full week—are not they seizable?

Mr. Mitchell mentioned to you a ballad, which I composed, and sung at one of his Excise Court dinners. Here it is:—

THE DEIL'S AWA' WI' THE EXCISEMAN.

TUNE—"*Madam Cossy.*"

Chorus—

The deil's awa', the deil's awa',
The deil's awa' wi' the Exciseman,
He's danc'd awa', he's danc'd awa',
He's danc'd awa' wi' the Exciseman, &c. &c.

[See p. 126, vol. iii.

If you honour my ballad by making it one of your charming *bon vivant* effusions, it will secure it undoubted celebrity.

I have the honour to be, Sir, your obliged and devoted humble servant,

R. B.

TO WILLIAM CREECH, ESQ.,

BOOKSELLER.

DUMFRIES, 16th April, 1792.

SIR,

I this moment have yours, and were it not that habit, as usual, has deadened conscience, my criminal indolence should lead me an uneasy life of reproach. I ought long ago to have written you on this very business.[2]

Now, to try a language of which I am not half master, I shall assume as well as I can, the man of business. I suppose, at a gross guess, that I could add of new materials to your two volumes, about fifty pages. I would also correct and retrench a good deal. These said fifty pages you know are as much mine as the thumb-stall I have just now drawn on my finger which I unfortunately gashed in mending my pen. A few books which I very much want, are all the recompense I crave, together with as many copies of this new edition of my own works as Friendship or Gratitude shall prompt me to present. There are three men whom you know, and whose friendly patronage

[1] The triumph could not have been very complete, or of long duration, for that he afterwards needed pecuniary assistance from Burns we shall find when dealing with a letter to Clarke in June, 1796. There, too, we learn that Clarke had left the school at Moffat for a similar appointment in Forfar.

[2] The business here alluded to was the proposed publication by Creech of a new edition of the poet's works in two vols. See letter to Peter Hill, p. 198, and note.

I think I can trouble so far—Messrs. M'Kenzie, D. Stewart, and F. Tytler; to any of these I shall submit my MSS. for their strictures; and also let *them* say on my informing them—I mean any of them—what *Authors* I want, to what value of them I am entitled. If he adjudge me a "Tom Thumb," I am content. "The Man of Feeling" and Professor Stewart, are, I hear, busy with works of their own, for which reason I shall prefer Tytler. So soon as I hear from you, I shall write Mr. Tytler, and in a fortnight more I shall put my MSS. in his hands.

If the thing were possible that I could receive the proof-sheets by our Dumfries Fly, which runs three times a week, I would earnestly wish to correct them myself.—I have the honour to be, Sir, your very humble servant,

R. B.

TO MR. JAMES JOHNSON,

ENGRAVER, LAWNMARKET, EDINBURGH.

DUMFRIES, May, 1792.

DEAR SIR,

This will be presented to you by one of your subscribers, and a gentleman to whose musical talents you are much indebted for getting you Scotch tunes. Let him know your progress, and how you come on with the work. Inclosed is one song out of many I have yet to send you; and likewise I enclose you another, and, I think, a better set of Craigieburnwood, which you will give to Mr. Clarke to compare with the former set, as I am extremely anxious to have that song right. I am, dear Sir, yours,

R. B.

TO MR. STEPHEN CLARKE,

ORGANIST, EDINBURGH.[1]

July 16th, 1792.

Mr. Burns begs leave to present his most respectful compliments to Mr. Clarke.—Mr. B. some time ago did himself the honour of writing Mr. C. respecting coming out to the country, to give a little musical instruction in a highly respectable family,[2] where Mr. C. may have his own terms, and may be as happy as indolence, the Devil, and the gout, will permit him. Mr. B. knows well how Mr. C. is engaged with another family; but cannot Mr. C. find two or three weeks to spare to each of them? Mr. B. is deeply impressed with, and awfully conscious of, the high importance of Mr. C.'s time, whether in the winged moments of symphonious exhibition, at the keys of harmony, while listening Seraphs cease their own less delightful strains; or in the drowsy arms of slumb'rous repose, in the arms of his dearly beloved elbow-chair, where the frowsy, but potent power of indolence, circumfuses her vapours round, and sheds her dews on the head of her darling son. But half a line conveying half a meaning from Mr. C. would make Mr. B. the happiest of mortals.

R. B.

[1] The gentleman who received this playful communication was the musical editor of Johnson's *Musical Museum*, to which Burns contributed so many of his finest songs.

TO ROBERT RIDDELL, ESQ.,

OF GLENRIDDELL.

[DUMFRIES, 1792.]

MY DEAR SIR,

On rummaging over some old papers I lighted on a manuscript of my early years, in which I had determined to write myself out; as I was placed by fortune among a class of men to whom my ideas would have been nonsense. I had meant that the book should have lain by me, in the fond hope that, some time or other, even after I was no more, my thoughts would fall into the hands of somebody capable of understanding their meaning. It sets off thus:—

OBSERVATIONS, HINTS, SONGS, SCRAPS OF POETRY, &c. BY R. B.

[See the poet's Common-place Book in this volume.]

TO THE DUKE OF QUEENSBERRY.

[DUMFRIES, 1792.]

MY LORD DUKE,

Will your Grace pardon this approach in a poor Poet, who perhaps intrudes on your converse with Princes, to present you—all he has

[2] The M'Murdos of Drumlanrig.

to offer—his best ballad, and to beg of you—all he has to ask—your gracious acceptance of it? Whatever might be my opinion of the merits of the poem, I would not have dared to take the liberty of presenting it thus, but for your Grace's acquaintance with the *Dramatis Personæ* of the piece.

When I first thought of sending my poem to your Grace, I had some misgivings of heart about it—something within me seemed to say:—"A nobleman of the first rank and the first taste, and who has lived in the first Court of Europe, what will he care for either you or your ballad? Depend upon it that he will look on this business as some one or other of the many modifications of that servility of soul with which authors, and particularly you poets, have ever approached the Great."

No! said I to myself, I am conscious of the purity of my motives; and as I never crouch to any man but the man I have wronged, nor even him unless he forgives me, I will approach his Grace with tolerable upright confidence, that were I and my ballad poorer stuff than we are, the Duke of Queensberry's polite affability would make me welcome, as my sole motive is to show how sincerely I have the honour to be, my Lord Duke, you Grace's most obedient humble servant,

R. B.[1]

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

ANNAN WATER FOOT, 22d August, 1792.

Do not blame me for it, Madam—my own conscience, hackneyed and weather-beaten as it is, in watching and reproving my vagaries, follies, indolence, &c., has continued to punish me sufficiently.

. . . . . .

Do you think it possible, my dear and honoured Friend, that I could be so lost to gratitude for many favours, to esteem for much worth, and to the honest, kind, pleasurable tie of now old acquaintance, and I hope and am sure of progressive, increasing friendship—as for a single day, not to think of you—to ask the Fates what they are doing and about to do with my much-beloved Friend and her wide-scattered connexions, and to beg of them to be as kind to you and yours as they possibly can?

Apropos! (though how it is apropos, I have not leisure to explain,) Do you know that I am almost in love with an acquaintance of yours? —Almost! said I—I am in love, souse! over head and ears, deep as the most unfathomable abyss of the boundless ocean; but the word Love, owing to the *intermingledoms* of the good and the bad, the pure and the impure, in this world, being rather an equivocal term for expressing one's sentiments and sensations, I must do justice to the sacred purity of my attachment. Know, then, that the heart-struck awe; the distant humble approach; the delight we should have in gazing upon and listening to a Messenger of Heaven, appearing in all the unspotted purity of his celestial home, among the coarse, polluted, far inferior sons of men, to deliver to them tidings that make their hearts swim in joy, and their imaginations soar in transport—such, so delighting and so pure, were the emotions of my soul on meeting the other day with Miss Lesley Baillie, your neighbour, at Mayfield. Mr. B. with his two daughters, accompanied by Mr. H. of G., passing through Dumfries a few days ago, on their way to England, did me the honour of calling on me; on which I took my horse, (though God knows I could ill spare the time,) and accompanied them fourteen or fifteen miles, and dined and spent the day with them. 'Twas about nine, I think, when I left them, and, riding home, I composed the following ballad, of which you will probably think you have a dear bargain, as it will cost you another groat of postage. You must know that there is an old ballad beginning with—

> My bonnie Lizzie Baillie
> I'll row thee in my plaidie, &c.

So I parodied it as follows, which is literally the first copy, "unanointed, unanneal'd," as Hamlet says:—

[1] In the Glenriddell collection the following note accompanies the above epistle:—"This was written shortly after I had the honour of being introduced to the Duke, at which introduction I spent the evening with him, when he treated me with the most distinguished politeness and marked attention. Though I am afraid his Grace's character as a Man of Worth is very equivocal, yet he is certainly a Nobleman of the first taste, and a Gentleman of the first manners. R. B."—We cannot, with any certainty, fix the date of the introduction, which, in all probability, was brought about by the poet's friend and the Duke's factor, Mr. M'Murdo.—The "ballad" referred to is the "Whistle."

O saw ye bonnie Lesley
As she gaed o'er the border?
She's gane, like Alexander,
To spread her conquests farther. &c.[1]

So much for ballads. I regret that you are gone to the east country, as I am to be in Ayrshire in about a fortnight. This world of ours, notwithstanding it has many good things in it, yet it has ever had this curse, that two or three people, who would be the happier the oftener they met together, are, almost without exception, always so placed as never to meet but once or twice a-year, which, considering the few years of a man's life, is a very great "evil under the sun," which I do not recollect that Solomon has mentioned in his catalogue of the miseries of man. I hope and believe that there is a state of existence beyond the grave, where the worthy of this life will renew their former intimacies, with this endearing addition, that "we meet to part no more!"

. . . . . .

Tell us, ye dead,
Will none of you in pity disclose the secret
What 'tis you are, and we must shortly be!

A thousand times have I made this apostrophe to the departed sons of men, but not one of them has ever thought fit to answer the question. "O that some courteous ghost would blab it out!" but it cannot be; you and I, my friend, must make the experiment by ourselves, and for ourselves. However, I am so convinced that an unshaken faith in the doctrines of religion is not only necessary, by making us better men, but also by making us happier men, that I shall take every care that your little godson, and every little creature that shall call me father, shall be taught them.

So ends this heterogeneous letter, written at this wild place of the world, in the intervals of my labour of discharging a vessel of rum from Antigua.

R. B.

TO MR. ALEX. CUNNINGHAM.

DUMFRIES, 10th Sept. 1792.

No! I will not attempt an apology.—Amid all my hurry of business, grinding the faces of the publican and sinner on the merciless wheels of the Excise; making ballads, and then drinking and singing them to my drink; and, over and above all, the correcting the press-work of two different publications;[2] still, still I might have stolen five minutes to dedicate to one of the first of my friends and fellow-creatures. I might have done, as I do at present when I am snatching an hour near "witching time of night," and scrawling a page or two—I might have congratulated my friend on his marriage; or I might have thanked the Caledonian archers for the honour they have done me, (though, to do myself justice, I intended to have done both in rhyme, else I had done both long ere now.)[3] Well, then, here is to your good health! for you must know, I have set a nipperkin of toddy by me, just by way of spell, to keep away the meikle horned Deil, or any of his subaltern imps who may be on their nightly rounds.

But what shall I write to you?—"The voice said, cry," and I said, "What shall I cry?"—O, thou Spirit! whatever thou art, or wherever thou makest thyself visible! be thou a Bogle by the eerie side of an auld thorn, in the dreary glen through which the herd callan maun bicker [herd-boy must run] in his gloamin route frae the fauld!—Be thou a Brownie, set, at dead of night, to thy task by the blazing ingle, or in the solitary barn, where the repercussions of thy iron flail half affright thyself, as thou performest the work of twenty of the sons of men, ere the cock-crowing summon thee to thy ample cog of substantial brose. Be thou a Kelpie, haunting the ford or ferry, in the starless night, mixing thy laughing yell with the howling of the storm and the roaring of the flood, as thou viewest the perils and miseries of man on the foundering horse, or in the tumbling boat!—Or, lastly, be thou a Ghost, paying thy nocturnal visits to the hoary ruins of decayed grandeur; or performing thy mystic rites in the shadow of the time-worn church, while the

[1] See vol. iii. page 128.

[2] In all probability, the forthcoming edition of his poems in two vols. recently alluded to, and the fifth vol. of Johnson's *Musical Museum*.

[3] This letter is headed in the Glenriddell collection as being written to Cunningham "Some little time after his marriage, and after, through his recommendation, I had been presented with a diploma from the Edinburgh Company of Royal Archers."—Both these events took place on the 10th April, so Burns's congratulations and thanks did come in rather late in the day.

moon looks, without a cloud, on the silent, ghastly dwellings of the dead beside thee; or taking thy stand by the bedside of the villain, or the murderer, portraying on their dreaming fancy, pictures, dreadful as the horrors of unveiled hell, and terrible as the wrath of incensed Deity!—Come, thou Spirit, but not in these horrid forms; come with the milder, gentle, easy inspirations, which thou breathest round the wig of a prating advocate, or the *tête-à-tête* of a tea-bibbing gossip, while their tongues run at the light-horse gallop of clish-maclaver [tittle-tattle] for ever and ever—come and assist a poor devil who is quite jaded in the attempt to share half an idea among half a hundred words; to fill up four quarto pages, while he has not got one single sentence of recollection, information, or remark worth recording.

I feel, I feel the presence of supernatural assistance! Circled in the embrace of my elbow-chair, my breast labours, like the bloated Sybil on her three-footed stool, and like her, too, labours with Nonsense.—Nonsense, auspicious name! Tutor, friend, and finger-post in the mystic mazes of law; the cadaverous paths of physic; and particularly in the sightless soarings of SCHOOL DIVINITY, who, leaving Common Sense confounded at his strength of pinion; Reason delirious with eyeing his giddy flight; and Truth—creeping back into the bottom of her well, cursing the hour that ever she offered her scorned alliance to the wizard power of Theologic Vision—raves abroad on all the winds. "On earth Discord! a gloomy Heaven above, opening her jealous gates to the nineteen thousandth part of the tithe of mankind! and below, an inescapable and inexorable hell, expanding its leviathan jaws for the vast residue of mortals!!!"—O doctrine! comfortable and healing to the weary, wounded soul of man! Ye sons and daughters of affliction, ye *pauvres misérables*, to whom day brings no pleasure, and night yields no rest, be comforted! "'Tis but *one* to nineteen hundred thousand that your situation will mend in this world;" so, alas, the experience of the poor and the needy too often affirms: and 'tis nineteen hundred thousand to *one*, by the dogmas of Theology, that you will be damned eternally in the world to come!

But of all Nonsense, Religious Nonsense is the most nonsensical; so enough, and more than enough of it. Only, by the bye, will you, or can you tell me, my dear Cunningham, why a religious turn of mind has always a tendency to narrow and illiberalize the heart? They are orderly: they may be just; nay, I have known them merciful: but still your children of super-sanctity move among their fellow-creatures with a nostril snuffling putrescence, and a foot spurning filth,—in short, with a conceited dignity that your titled Douglases, Hamiltons, Gordons, or any other of your Scottish lordlings of seven centuries standing, display when they accidentally mix among the many aproned sons of mechanical life. I remember, in my plough-boy days, I could not conceive it possible that a noble lord could be a fool, or that a godly man could be a knave.—How ignorant are plough-boys!—Nay, I have since discovered that a *godly woman* may be a . . . !—But hold—Here's t'ye again—this rum is generous Antigua, so a very unfit menstruum for scandal.

Apropos, how do you like, I mean *really* like, the married life? Ah, my friend! matrimony is quite a different thing from what your love-sick youths and sighing girls take it to be! But marriage, we are told, is appointed by God, and I shall never quarrel with any of his institutions. I am a husband of older standing than you, and shall give you *my* ideas of the conjugal state, (*en passant*; you know I am no Latinist, is not *conjugal* derived from *jugum*, a yoke?) Well then, the scale of good wifeship I divide into ten parts.—Goodnature, four; Good Sense, two; Wit, one; Personal Charms, viz. a sweet face, eloquent eyes, fine limbs, graceful carriage, (I would add a fine waist too, but that is so soon spoilt, you know,) all these, one; as for the other qualities belonging to, or attending on, a wife, such as Fortune, Connexions, Education, (I mean education extraordinary) Family blood, &c., divide the two remaining degrees among them as you please; only, remember that all these minor properties must be expressed by *fractions*, for there is not any one of them, in the aforesaid scale, entitled to the dignity of an *integer*.

As for the rest of my fancies and reveries—how I lately met with Miss Lesley Baillie, the most beautiful, elegant woman in the world—

how I accompanied her and her father's family fifteen miles on their journey, out of pure devotion, to admire the loveliness of the works of God, in such an unequalled display of them—how, in galloping home at night, I made a ballad on her, of which the two following stanzas are a part—

Thou, bonnie Lesley, art a queen,
Thy subjects we before thee;
Thou, bonnie Lesley, art divine,
The hearts o' men adore thee.

The very Deil he could na scathe
Whatever wad belang thee!
He'd look into thy bonnie face
And say, "I canna wrang thee"—[1]

behold all these are written in the chronicles of my imagination, and shall be read by thee, my dear Friend, and by thy beloved spouse, my other dear Friend, at a more convenient season.

Now, to thee, and to thy before-designed *bosom*-companion, be given the precious things brought forth by the sun, and the precious things brought forth by the moon, and the benignest influences of the stars, and the living streams which flow from the fountains of life, and by the tree of life, for ever and ever! Amen!

R. B.

TO MR. CORBET,

SUPERVISOR-GENERAL OF EXCISE.

[DUMFRIES, Sept. 1792.]

SIR,

When I was honoured with your most obliging letter, I said to myself, "A simple letter of thanks will be a very poor return for so much kindness. I shall likewise send the gentleman a cargo of my best and newest rhymes." However, my new division holds me so very busy, and several things in it being rather new to me, my time has hitherto been totally engrossed. When a man is strongly impressed with a sense of something he ought to do, at the same time that want of leisure, or want of opportunity, or want of assistance, or want of information, or want of paper, pen, and ink, or any other of the many wants which flesh is heir to—when sense of duty pulls one way, and necessity (or, alas! too often indolence under necessity's garb) pulls another—you are too well acquainted with poor human nature to be told what a devil of a life Conscience leads us.

Old as I am in acquaintance, and grown grey in connexion with slips, frips, failings, frailties, backslidings in the paths of grace, and all other light-horse militia of iniquity, never did my poor back suffer such a scarification from the scourge of Conscience as during these three weeks that your kind epistle has lain by me unanswered. A negro-wench under the rod of a West India mistress, a nurse under the caprices of a spoilt child, the only son and heir of a booby squire; nay a henpecked husband under the displeasure of his virago wife, were enviable predicaments to mine. At last, by way of compromise, I return you by this my most grateful thanks for all the generous friendship and disinterested patronage for which now and formerly I have the honour to be indebted to you, and as to my rhymes—another edition in two volumes, of my poems being in the press—I shall beg leave to present a copy to Mrs. Corbet as my first, and I will venture to add, most effectual mediator with you on my behalf. I have the honour to be, &c.,

R. B.

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

DUMFRIES, 24th September, 1792.

I have this moment, my dear Madam, yours of the twenty-third. All your other kind reproaches, your news, &c., are out of my head when I read and think on Mrs. Henri's situation.[2] Good God! a heart-wounded helpless young woman—in a strange, foreign land, and that land convulsed with every horror that can harrow the human feelings—sick—looking, longing for a comforter, but finding none—a mother's feelings, too:—but it is too much: He who wounded (He only can) may He heal! . . .

I wish the farmer great joy of his new ac-

[1] See vol. iii. p. 128, where a somewhat different version of the lines is given.

[2] See note to the poem "On the Birth of a Posthumous Child," page 86, vol. iii.

quisition to his family. . . . I cannot say that I give him joy of his life as a farmer. 'Tis, as a farmer paying a dear, unconscionable rent, a *cursed life!* As to a laird farming his own property; sowing his corn in hope; and reaping it, in spite of brittle weather, in gladness; knowing that none can say unto him, "what doest thou?" –fattening his herds; shearing his flocks; rejoicing at Christmas; and begetting sons and daughters, until he be the venerated, grey-haired leader of a little tribe—'tis a heavenly life! but devil take the life of reaping the fruits that another must eat.

Well, your kind wishes will be gratified, as to seeing me when I make my Ayrshire visit. I cannot leave Mrs. Burns, until her nine months' race is run, which may perhaps be in three or four weeks. She, too, seems determined to make me the patriarchal leader of a band. However, if Heaven will be so obliging as to let me have them in the proportion of three boys to one girl, I shall be so much the more pleased.[1] I hope, if I am spared with them, to show a set of boys that will do honour to my cares and name; but I am not equal to the task of rearing girls. Besides, I am too poor; a girl should always have a fortune. Apropos, your little godson is thriving charmingly, but is a very devil. He, though two years younger, has completely mastered his brother. Robert is indeed the mildest, gentlest creature I ever saw. He has a most surprising memory, and is quite the pride of his schoolmaster.

You know how readily we get into prattle upon a subject dear to our heart: you can excuse it. God bless you and yours!

R. B.

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

[DUMFRIES, Oct. 1792.]

I had been from home, and did not receive your letter[2] until my return the other day. What shall I say to comfort you, my much-valued, much-afflicted Friend! I can but grieve with you; consolation I have none to offer, except that which Religion holds out to the children of Affliction—*children of Affliction!*—how just the expression! and like every other family they have matters among them which they hear, see, and feel in a serious, all-important manner, of which the world has not, nor cares to have, any idea. The world looks indifferently on, makes the passing remark, and proceeds to the next novel occurrence.

Alas, Madam! who would wish for many years? What is it but to drag existence until our joys gradually expire, and leave us in a night of misery: like the gloom which blots out the stars, one by one, from the face of night, and leaves us, without a ray of comfort in the howling waste!

I am interrupted, and must leave off. You shall soon hear from me again.

R. B.

[1] See note to letter to Mrs. Dunlop of 6th December.

[2] This letter informed Burns of the death of her daughter, Mrs. Henri, which took place at Muges, in the south of France, on the 15th September.

TO CAPTAIN JOHNSTONE,

EDINBURGH.[3]

DUMFRIES, Nov. 13th, 1792.

SIR,

I have just read your prospectus of the *Edinburgh Gazetteer*. If you go on in your paper with the same spirit, it will, beyond all comparison, be the first composition of the kind in Europe. I beg leave to insert my name as a subscriber, and, if you have already published any papers, please send me them from the beginning. Point out your own way of settling payments in this place, or I shall settle with you through the medium of my friend, Peter Hill, bookseller, in Edinburgh.

Go on, Sir! Lay bare with undaunted heart and steady hand, that horrid mass of corrup-

[3] The founder and editor of the *Edinburgh Gazetteer*, a paper started about this time to "promote a redress of grievances, and a full, free, and equal representation of the people in parliament;" rather dangerous claims when the country was deeply agitated by the outbreak of the French Revolution. In the spring of 1793, the *Gazetteer* having incurred the displeasure of the government of the day, Captain Johnstone was apprehended and imprisoned. During his imprisonment the paper was conducted by a gentleman of the name of Scott, whose labours did not long escape the lynx-eyes of the official underlings. He, too, was apprehended and held to bail. He foresaw his fate; forfeited his bail, and escaped to America. The *Gazetteer* was then discontinued.

tion called politics and state-craft.—Dare to draw in their native colours these—

Calm—thinking villains whom no faith can fire,—

whatever be the shibboleth of their pretended party.

The address to me at Dumfries will find, Sir, your very humble servant,

R. B.

TO MRS. WALTER RIDDELL,

WOODLEY PARK.

[DUMFRIES, Nov. 1792.]

MADAM,

I return you my most sincere thanks for the honour you have done me in presenting me with a copy of your Book.[1] Be assured I shall ever keep it sacred. . . .

R. B.

TO MRS. WALTER RIDDELL,

WOODLEY PARK.

[DUMFRIES, Nov. 1792.]

I am thinking to send my "Address" to some periodical publication, but it has not got your sanction, so pray look over it.[2]

As to the Tuesday's play,[3] let me beg of you, my dear Madam, to give us, "The Wonder, a Woman keeps a Secret!" to which please add, "The Spoilt Child"—you will highly oblige me by so doing.

Ah, what an enviable creature you are! There now, this cursed gloomy blue-devil day, you are going to a party of choice spirits—

To play the shapes
Of frolic fancy, and incessant form
Those rapid pictures, that assembled train
Of fleet ideas, never join'd before,
Where lively *wit* excites to gay surprise;
Or folly-painting *humour*, grave himself,
Calls laughter forth, deep shaking every nerve.

But as you rejoice with them that do rejoice, do also remember to weep with them that weep, and pity your melancholy friend,

R. B.

TO MISS FONTENELLE.[4]

[DUMFRIES, November, 1792.]

MADAM,

In such a bad world as ours, those who add to the scanty sum of our pleasures are positively our benefactors. To you, Madam, on our humble Dumfries boards, I have been more indebted for entertainment than ever I was in prouder theatres. Your charms as a woman would insure applause to the most indifferent actress, and your theatrical talents would insure admiration to the plainest figure. This, Madam, is not the unmeaning or insidious compliment of the frivolous or interested; I pay it from the same honest impulse that the sublime of Nature excites my admiration, or her beauties give me delight.

Will the foregoing lines be of any service to you in your approaching benefit-night?[5] If they will, I shall be prouder of my muse than ever. They are nearly extempore: I know they have no great merit; but though they should add but little to the entertainment of the evening, they give me the happiness of an opportunity to declare how much I have the honour to be, &c.

R. B.

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[1] See letter to Smellie, 22d January, 1792, and note. Smellie thought highly of Mrs. Riddell's book. After reading her MS. he wrote her:—"If I had not previously had the pleasure of your conversation, the devil himself could not have frightened me into the belief that a female human creature could, in the bloom of youth, beauty, and consequently of giddiness, have produced a performance so much out of the line of your ladies' works. . . . Science, minute observation, accurate description, and excellent composition are qualities seldom to be met with in the female world."

[2] "On the Rights of Woman." See the following letter to Miss Fontenelle.

[3] Mrs. Riddell was about to bespeak a play on this evening at the Dumfries theatre.

[4] At this time an actress in the Dumfries theatre of considerable personal attractions. She played light comedy parts, such as *Little Pickle* in the "Spoiled Child," with rare animation and grace.

[5] The bill of this benefit-night [Nov. 26, 1792] announced the "Country Girl" as the play, and that thereafter, Miss Fontenelle would deliver a new Occasional Address, written by Mr. Robert Burns, called "The Rights of Woman."

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

DUMFRIES, 6th December, 1792.

I shall be in Ayrshire, I think, next week; and, if at all possible, I shall certainly, my much esteemed Friend, have the pleasure of visiting at Dunlop-house.[1]

Alas, Madam! how seldom do we meet in this world, that we have reason to congratulate ourselves on accessions of happiness! I have not passed half the ordinary term of an old man's life, and yet I scarcely look over the obituary of a newspaper, that I do not see some names that I have known, and which I, and other acquaintances, little thought to meet with there so soon. Every other instance of the mortality of our kind, makes us cast an anxious look into the dreadful abyss of uncertainty, and shudder with apprehension for our own fate. But of how different an importance are the lives of different individuals! Nay, of what importance is one period of the same life, more than another? A few years ago, I could have lain down in the dust, "careless of the voice of the morning;" and now not a few, and these most helpless individuals, would, on losing me and my exertions, lose both their "staff and shield." By the way, these helpless ones have lately got an addition; Mrs. Burns having given me a fine girl since I wrote you.[2] There is a charming passage in Thomson's "Edward and Eleanora:"

> The valiant, *in himself*, what can he suffer?
> Or what need he regard his *single* woes? &c.

As I am in the way of quotations, I shall give you another from the same piece, peculiarly, alas! too peculiarly apposite, my dear Madam, to your frame of mind:

> Who so unworthy but may proudly deck him
> With his fair-weather virtue, that exults
> Glad o'er the summer main? the tempest comes,
> The rough winds rage aloud; when from the helm
> This virtue shrinks, and in a corner lies
> Lamenting.—Heavens! if privileged from trial
> How cheap a thing were virtue!

I do not remember to have heard you mention Thomson's dramas. I pick my favourite quotations, and store them in my mind as ready armour, offensive or defensive, amid the struggle of this turbulent existence. Of these is one, a very favourite one, from his "Alfred:"

> Attach thee firmly to the virtuous deeds
> And offices of life; to life itself,
> With all its vain and transient joys, sit loose.

Probably I have quoted some of these to you formerly, as indeed, when I write from the heart, I am apt to be guilty of such repetitions. The compass of the heart, in the musical style of expression, is much more bounded than that of the imagination; so the notes of the former are extremely apt to run into one another; but in return for the paucity of its compass, its few notes are much more sweet. I must still give you another quotation, which I am almost sure I have given you before, but I cannot resist the temptation. The subject is Religion—speaking of its importance to mankind, the author says,

> 'Tis this, my friend, that streaks our morning bright, &c.

[As in letter to Mrs. Dunlop of 6th September, 1789.]

I see you are in for double postage, so I shall c'en scribble out t'other sheet. We in this country here, have many alarms of the reforming, or rather the republican spirit, of your part of the kingdom. Indeed we are a good deal in commotion ourselves. For me, I am a "placeman," you know; a very humble one indeed, Heaven knows, but still so much as to gag me. What my private sentiments are, you will find out without an interpreter.

. . . . . .

I have taken up the subject, in another view, and the other day, for a pretty actress's benefit-night, I wrote an address, which I will give on the other page, called "The Rights of Woman:"

> While Europe's eye is fix'd on mighty things, &c.[3]

I shall have the honour of receiving your criticisms in person at Dunlop.

R. B.

[1] The poet did visit Ayrshire about the time indicated and spent four days at Dunlop House.

[2] Elizabeth Riddell Burns, so named after the wife of Captain Riddell of Friars' Carse, was born on the 21st November, 1792. She lived only about three years, dying, as will be seen, in the autumn of 1795.

[3] See vol. iii. page 132.

TO MISS MARY PEACOCK,

EDINBURGH.[1]

DUMFRIES, Dec. 6, 1792.

DEAR MADAM,

I have written so often to you and have got no answer, that I had resolved never to lift a pen to you again; but this eventful day, *the sixth of December*,[2] recalls to my memory such a scene! Heaven and earth! when I remember a far-distant person![3]—but no more of this until I learn from you a proper address, and why my letters have lain by you unanswered, as this is the third I have sent you. The opportunities will be all gone now I fear of sending the book I mentioned in my last. Do not write me for a week, as I shall not be at home, but as soon after that as possible:—

Ance mair I hail thee, thou gloomy December!
Ance mair I hail thee, wi' sorrow and care;
Dire was the parting thou bidst me remember,
Parting wi' Nancy, oh, ne'er to meet mair![4]

Yours,

R. B.

TO R. GRAHAM, ESQ.,

FINTRY.

December, 1792.

SIR,

I have been surprised, confounded, and distracted by Mr. Mitchell, the collector, telling me that he has received an order from your Board[5] to inquire into my political conduct, and blaming me as a person disaffected to government.[6] Sir, you are a husband and a father.—You know what you would feel, to see the much-loved wife of your bosom, and your helpless, prattling little ones, turned adrift into the world, degraded and disgraced from a situation in which they had been respectable and respected, and left almost without the necessary support of a miserable existence. Alas, Sir! must I think that such, soon, will be my lot? and from the damned, dark insinuations of hellish groundless envy too? I believe, Sir, I may aver it, and in the sight of Omniscience, that I would not tell a deliberate falsehood, no, not though even worse horrors, if worse can be, than those I have mentioned, hung over my head; and I say, that the allegation, whatever villain has made it, is a lie! To the British Constitution, on Revolution principles, next after my God, I am most devoutly attached. You, Sir, have been much and generously my friend. Heaven knows how warmly I have felt the obligation, and how gratefully I have thanked you.—Fortune, Sir, has made you powerful, and me impotent; has given you patronage, and me dependence.—I would not for my single self call on your humanity; were such my insular, unconnected situation, I would despise the tear that now swells in my eye—I could brave misfortune, I could face ruin; for at the worst, "Death's thousand doors stand open;" but, good God! the tender concerns that I have mentioned, the claims and ties that I see at this moment, and feel around me, how they unnerve courage, and wither resolution! To your patronage, as a man of some genius, you have allowed me a claim; and your esteem, as an honest man, I know is my due. To these, Sir, permit me to appeal. By these may I adjure you to save me from that misery which threatens to overwhelm me, and which, with my latest breath I will say it, I have not deserved.

R. B.

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

DUMFRIES, 31st Dec. 1792.

DEAR MADAM,

A hurry of business, thrown in heaps by my absence, has until now prevented my returning my grateful acknowledgments to the good family of Dunlop, and you in particular, for

[1] This lady was one of Clarinda's most intimate friends, and frequently met Burns in his fair enslaver's house.

[2] On the 6th December of the previous year Sylvander and Clarinda had their parting meeting previous to the lady's departure to rejoin her husband in the West Indies.

[3] Burns apparently had not been made aware that Clarinda had returned disappointed from the West Indies, arriving in Edinburgh in August, 1792. See Clarinda Correspondence.

[4] See vol. iii. p. 122.

[5] The Scottish Board of Excise, the commissioners of which at this time were, George Brown, Thomas Wharton, James Stodart, John Grieve, and Robert Graham, Esquires.

[6] This subject is fully discussed in Lockhart's *Life*, which see.

that hospitable kindness which rendered the four days I spent under that genial roof, four of the pleasantest I ever enjoyed.—Alas, my dearest Friend! how few and fleeting are those things we call pleasures! on my road to Ayrshire, I spent a night with a friend whom I much valued; a man whose days promised to be many; and on Saturday last we laid him in the dust!

[Jan. 2d, 1793.]

I have just received yours of the 30th, and feel much for your situation. However, I heartily rejoice in your prospect of recovery from that vile jaundice. As to myself, I am better, though not quite free of my complaint.[1] —You must not think, as you seem to insinuate, that in my way of life I want exercise. Of that I have enough; but occasional hard drinking is the devil to me. Against this I have again and again bent my resolution, and have greatly succeeded. Taverns I have totally abandoned: it is the private parties in the family way, among the hard-drinking gentlemen of this country, that do me the mischief —but even this, I have more than half given over.[2]

Mr. Corbet can be of little service to me at present; at least I should be shy of applying. I cannot possibly be settled as a supervisor, for several years. I must wait the rotation of the list, and there are twenty names before mine.—I might indeed get a job of officiating, where a settled supervisor was ill, or aged; but that hauls me from my family, as I could not remove them on such an uncertainty. Besides, some envious, malicious devil has raised a little demur on my political principles, and I wish to let that matter settle before I offer myself too much in the eye of my supervisors. I have set, henceforth, a seal on my lips, as to these unlucky politics; but to you, I must breathe my sentiments. In this, as in every thing else, I shall show the undisguised emotions of my soul. War I deprecate: misery and ruin to thousands are in the blast that announces the destructive demon. But—[3]

5th Jan. 1793.

You see my hurried life, Madam: I can only command starts of time; however, I am glad of one thing; since I finished the other sheet, the political blast that threatened my welfare is overblown. I have corresponded with Commissioner Graham, for the board had made me the subject of their animadversions; and now I have the pleasure of informing you that all is set to rights in that quarter. Now, as to these informers, may the devil be let loose to —— but, hold! I was praying most fervently in my last sheet, and I must not so soon fall a swearing in this.

Alas! how little do the wantonly or idly officious think what mischief they do by their malicious insinuations, indirect impertinence, or thoughtless blabbings! What a difference there is in intrinsic worth, candour, benevolence, generosity, kindness,—in all the charities

[1] Palpitation of the heart.

[2] "The following extract," says Cromek, "from a letter addressed by Mr. Bloomfield to the Earl of Buchan, contains so interesting an exhibition of the modesty inherent in real worth, and so philosophical, and at the same time so poetical an estimate of the different characters and destinies of Burns and its author, that I should esteem myself culpable were I to withhold it from the public view:"—

"The illustrious soul that has left among us the name of Burns, has often been lowered down to a comparison with me: but the comparison exists more in circumstances than in essentials. That man stood up with the stamp of superior intellect on his brow: a visible greatness: and great and patriotic subjects would only have called into action the powers of his mind, which lay inactive while he played calmly and exquisitely the pastoral pipe.

"The letters to which I have alluded in my preface to the *Rural Tales*, were friendly warnings, pointed with immediate reference to the fate of that extraordinary man. 'Remember Burns, has been the watchword of my friends. I do remember Burns; but I *am not* Burns! neither have I his fire to fan or to quench; nor his passions to control! Where then is my merit if I make a peaceful voyage on a smooth sea and with no mutiny on board? To a lady (I have it from herself), who remonstrated with him on his danger from drink, and the pursuits of some of his associates, he replied, 'Madam, they would not thank me for my company, if I did not drink with them.—I *must* give them a slice of my constitution.' How much to be regretted that he did not give them thinner slices of his constitution, that it might have lasted longer!"

From a later paragraph of this very letter it will be seen that Burns's good resolutions were not strong enough to keep him from a hard-drinking bout with "two worthy fellows" in his own house.

[3] Dr. Currie is said to have deleted and altered passages of this letter owing to its political sentiments, and he erroneously printed the following portion as a separate letter, giving it, too, under the date 5th Jan. 1792.

and all the virtues—between one class of human beings and another. For instance, the amiable circle I so lately mixed with in the hospitable hall of Dunlop, their generous hearts—their uncontaminated dignified minds—their informed and polished understandings—what a contrast, when compared—if such comparing were not downright sacrilege—with the soul of the miscreant who can deliberately plot the destruction of an honest man that never offended him, and with a grin of satisfaction see the unfortunate being, his faithful wife, and prattling innocents, turned over to beggary and ruin!

Your cup, my dear Madam, arrived safe. I had two worthy fellows dining with me the other day, when I, with great formality, produced my whigmaleerie cup,[1] and told them that it had been a family-piece among the descendants of William Wallace. This roused such an enthusiasm that they insisted on bumpering the punch round in it; and, by and bye, never did your great ancestor lay a *Suthron* more completely to rest than for a time did your cup my two friends.[2] Apropos, this is the season of wishing. May God bless you, my dear friend, and bless me, the humblest and sincerest of your friends, by granting you yet many returns of the season! May all good things attend you and yours wherever they are scattered over the earth!

R. B.

[1] A cup of cocoa-nut mounted on a stalk and rimmed with silver, presented to him by Mrs. Dunlop.

[2] About this time, as Chambers tells us, Burns had engaged a clerical friend of his, the Rev. Mr. M'Morine of Caerlaverock, to come to his house to baptize his recently born daughter. The clergyman made his appearance accordingly, but earlier, perhaps, than he was expected. On being ushered into the parlour he found a party composed of the poet and two companions, who had evidently been sitting carousing all night. The description which the clergyman gave of the two visitors corresponds exactly with what Burns hints at in the above letter. The poet seemed taken by surprise, but in perfect possession of himself, and he very quickly put matters in decent order for the performance of the baptismal ceremony. This incident gave the clergyman, we are told, "an unfavourable leaning towards the poet," though hitherto he had been more friendly to him than most of the cloth.

TO ROBERT GRAHAM, ESQ.,

OF FINTRY.

DUMFRIES, 5th January, 1793.

SIR,

I am this moment favoured with your letter: with what feelings I received this other instance of your goodness, I shall not pretend to describe.

Now to the charges which malice and misrepresentation have brought against me. It has been said, it seems, that I not only belong to, but head a disaffected party in this place. I know of no party in this place, either Republican or Reform, except an old party of Burgh-reform, with which I never had any thing to do. Individuals, both republican and reform, we have, though not many of either; but if they have associated, it is more than I have the least notice of, and if there exists such an association, it must consist of such obscure, nameless beings, as precludes any possibility of my being known to them, or they to me.

I was at the playhouse last night when *Ça ira* was called for. I was in the middle of the pit, and from the pit the clamour arose. One or two individuals with whom I occasionally associate, were of the party, but I neither knew of the plot, nor joined in the plot, nor ever opened my lips either to hiss or huzza *that*, or any other political tune whatever. I looked on myself as far too obscure a man to have any weight in quelling a riot, and at the same time, as a character of higher respectability than to yell to the howlings of a rabble. This was the conduct of all the first characters in the place; and these characters know, and will avow, that such was my conduct.[3]

[3] The following account of an incident which occurred in Dumfries theatre while Burns was present was communicated to Allan Cunningham by Mr. Charles Kirkpatrick Sharpe. As Mr. Sharpe says nothing about "Ça Ira," he may not be describing the occurrence referred to by the poet.

"I think you do human nature injustice as to malicious people entrapping Burns in his political conversations; for I know that he was most woefully indiscreet on that point, and I remember one proof. We were at the play in Dumfries, in October 1792—the Caledonian Hunt being then in the town. The play was 'As You Like It;' Miss Fontenelle, *Rosalind*, when 'God Save the King' was called for and sung; we all stood up uncovered, but Burns sat still

I never uttered any invectives against the king. His private worth it is altogether impossible that such a man as I can appreciate; but in his public capacity I alway revered, and always will, with the soundest loyalty revere the monarch of GREAT BRITAIN, as (to speak in Masonic) the sacred KEYSTONE of our ROYAL ARCH CONSTITUTION.

As to REFORM PRINCIPLES, I look upon the British Constitution, as settled at the Revolution, to be the most glorious Constitution on earth, or that perhaps the wit of man can frame; at the same time I think—and you know what high and distinguished characters have for some time thought so—that we have a good deal deviated from the original principles of that Constitution; particularly, that an alarming system of corruption has pervaded the connection between the Executive power and the House of Commons. This is the truth, and the whole truth of my Reform opinions, which, before I was aware of the complexion of these innovating times, I, too unguardedly (now I see it) sported with; but henceforth I seal up my lips. However, I never dictated to, corresponded with, or had the least connection with any political association whatever—except that when the magistrates and principal inhabitants of this town met to declare their attachment to the Constitution, and their abhorrence of riot, which declaration you will see in the papers, I—as I thought my duty as a subject at large, and a citizen in particular, called upon me—subscribed the same declaratory creed.

Of Johnstone, the publisher of the *Edinburgh Gazetteer*, I know nothing. One evening, in company with four or five friends, we met with his Prospectus, which we thought manly and independent; and I wrote to him ordering his paper for us. If you think that I act improperly in allowing his paper to come addressed to me, I shall immediately countermand it. I never, so judge me God! wrote a line of prose for the *Gazetteer* in my life. An occasional address, spoken by Miss Fontenelle on her benefit night here, which I called "The Rights of Woman," I sent to the *Gazetteer*, as also some extempore stanzas on the commemoration of Thomson; both of these I will subjoin for your perusal. You will see they have nothing whatever to do with politics. At the time when I sent Johnstone one of these poems (but which one I do not remember) I enclosed, at the request of my warm and worthy friend Robert Riddell, Esq., of Glenriddell, a prose essay signed Cato, written by him, and addressed to the delegates for County Reform, of which he was one for this County. With the merits or demerits of that essay, I have nothing to do, farther than transmitting it in the same frank, which frank he procured me.

As to France, I was her enthusiastic votary in the beginning of the business. When she came to show her old avidity for conquest in annexing Savoy, &c. to her dominions, and invading the rights of Holland, I altered my sentiments. A tippling ballad which I made, on Prince of Brunswick's breaking up his camp, and sung one convivial evening, I shall likewise send you, sealed up, as it is not for everybody's reading. This last is not worth your perusal; but lest Mrs. FAME should, as she has already done, use and even abuse her old privilege of lying, you shall be the master of everything, *le pour et le contre*, of my political writings and conduct.

This, my honoured Patron, is all. To this statement I challenge disquisition. Mistaken prejudice or unguarded passion may mislead, and often have misled me; but when called on to answer for my mistakes, though—I will say it—no man can feel keener compunction for his errors, yet I trust, no man can be more superior to evasion or disguise.[1]

I shall do myself the honour to thank Mrs. Graham for her goodness in a separate letter.

If, Sir, I have been so fortunate as to do away with these misapprehensions of my conduct and character, I shall, with the confidence which you were wont to allow me, apply to

in the middle of the pit with his hat on his head. There was a great tumult, with shouts of 'Turn him out!—shame, Burns,' &c., which continued a good while. At last he was either expelled or forced to take off his hat—I forget which; nor can my mother remember. This silly conduct all sensible persons condemned."

The same account, in slightly different language, is given in Prof. Wilson's essay (which see).

[1] We have elsewhere referred to this letter as tending to disprove the story regarding Burns sending four carronades to the French government, no mention of any such transaction being here made although the poet is confessing his faults.

your goodness on every opening in the way of business where I think I may with propriety offer myself—An instance that occurs just now. Mr. M'Farlane, Supervisor of the Galloway district, is and has been for sometime very ill. I spoke to Mr. Mitchell as to his wishes to forward my application for the job; but though he expressed, and ever does express, every kindness for me, he hesitates, in hopes that the disease may be of short continuance. However, as it seems to be a paralytic affection, I fear it may be some time before he can take charge of so extended a district. There is a great deal of fatigue and very little business in the district—two things suitable enough to my hardy constitution, and inexperience in that line of life.

I have the honour to be, Sir, your ever grateful, and as highly obliged, humble servant, R. B.

TO MRS. GRAHAM OF FINTRY.

DUMFRIES, 5th Janv. 1793.

THE RIGHTS OF WOMAN.

An occasional address, spoken by Miss Fontenelle on her benefit night, 26th Nov. 1792.

[Vol. iii. p. 132.]

To Mrs. Graham of Fintry this little Poem, written in haste on the spur of the occasion, and therefore inaccurate, but a sincere compliment to that sex, *the most amiable of the works of God*, is most respectfully presented by

THE AUTHOR.

TO MR. WILLIAM NICOL.[1]

20th February, 1792.

O thou, wisest among the Wise, meridian blaze of Prudence, full moon of Discretion, and chief of many Counsellors! How infinitely is thy puddle-headed, rattle-headed, wrong-headed, round-headed slave, indebted to thy super-eminent goodness, that from the luminous path of thy own right-lined rectitude, thou lookest benignly down on an erring wretch, of whom the zig-zag wanderings defy all the powers of calculation, from the simple copulation of units, up to the hidden mysteries of fluxions! May one feeble ray of that light of wisdom which darts from thy sensorium, straight as the arrow of heaven, and bright as the meteor of inspiration descending from the holy and undefiled Priesthood against the head of the Unrighteous,—may it be my portion, so that I may be less unworthy of the face and favour of that father of Proverbs and master of Maxims, that antipode of Folly, and magnet among the Sages, the wise and witty Willie Nicol! Amen! Amen! Yea, so be it!

For me! I am a beast, a reptile, and know nothing! From the cave of my ignorance, amid the fogs of my dulness, and pestilential fumes of my political heresies, I look up to thee, as doth a toad through the iron-barred lucerne of a pestiferous dungeon, to the cloudless glory of a summer sun! Sorely sighing in bitterness of soul, I say, "When shall my name be the quotation of the wise, and my countenance be the delight of the godly, like the illustrious lord of Laggan's many hills?[2] As for him, his works are perfect: never did the pen of Calumny blur the fair page of his reputation, nor the bolt of Hatred fly at his dwelling. At his approach is the standing up of men, even the Chiefs and the Rulers; and

[1] This ironical rhapsody was in answer to a letter from Nicol, of which, as Burns thought it worth while transcribing it among his own letters in the Glenriddell collection, we will give the first paragraph:

EDINBURGH, 10th February, 1793.

DEAR CHRISTLESS BOBBIE,

What is become of thee? Has the Devil flown off with thee, as the gled does with a bird? If he should do so there is little matter, if the reports concerning thy *imprudence* are true. What concerns it thee whether the lousy Dumfriesian fiddlers play "Ça Ira," or "God save the King?" Suppose you had an aversion to the king, you could not, as a gentleman, wish God to use him worse than he has done. The infliction of Idiocy is no sign of Friendship or Love; and I am sure damnation is a matter far beyond your wishes or ideas. But reports of this kind are only the insidious suggestions of ill-minded persons; for your good sense will ever point out to you as well as to me, a bright model of political conduct, who flourished in the victorious reign of Queen Anne, viz., the Vicar of Bray, who, during the convulsions of Great Britain which were without any former example, saw eight reigns in perfect security; because he remembered that precept of the *sensible, shrewd, temporising* Apostle, "We ought not to resist the Higher Powers," &c.

WM. NICOL.

[2] Nicol had purchased, in 1790, a small estate on the river Nith, called Laggan, to which he retreated during his school vacations.

before his presence the frail form of lovely Woman, humbly awaiting his pleasure, is extended on the dust."

Thou mirror of Purity, when shall the elfin-lamp of my glimmerous understanding, purged from sensual appetites and gross desires, shine like the constellation of thy intellectual powers!—As for thee, thy thoughts are pure, and thy lips are holy. Never did the unhallowed breath of the powers of darkness, and the pleasures of darkness, pollute the sacred flame of thy sky-descended and heaven-ward desires: never did the vapours of impurity stain the unclouded serene of thy cerulean imagination. O that like thine were the tenor of my life, like thine the tenor of my conversation!—then should no friend fear for my strength, no enemy rejoice in my weakness! Then should I lie down and rise up, and none to make me afraid.—May thy pity and thy prayer be exercised for, O thou lamp of Wisdom and mirror of Morality! thy devoted slave, R. B.[1]

TO ALEXANDER CUNNINGHAM, ESQ.,

EDINBURGH.

DUMFRIES, 20th Feb. 1793.

What are you doing? What hurry have you got on your head, my dear Cunningham, that I have not heard from you? Are you deeply engaged in the mazes of the law, the mysteries of love, or in the profound wisdom of modern politics? Curse on the word which ended the period!

Quere.—What is Politics?

Answer.—Politics is a scheme wherewith, by means of nefarious cunning, and hypocritical pretence, we govern civil politics for the emolument of ourselves and adherents.

Quere.—What is a Minister?

Answer.—A Minister is an unprincipled fellow, who, by the influence of hereditary or acquired wealth—by superior abilities, or by a lucky conjuncture of circumstances, obtains a principal place in the administration of the affairs of government.

[1] We possess no subsequent communications between Burns and Nicol. Allan Cunningham absurdly supposed that Burns was serious, and remarks that "the irascible pedant was silent ever afterwards." The two remained as good friends as ever. Nicol died in April, 1797, less than a year after Burns.

Quere.—What is a Patriot?

Answer.—A Patriot is an individual of exactly the same description as a Minister, only out of place.

I am interrupted in my catechism, and am returned at a late hour, just to subscribe my name, to put you in mind that there is a forgotten friend of yours of that name still in the land of the living, though I can hardly say "in the place of hope."

I made the following Sonnet the other day, which has been so lucky as to obtain the approbation of no ordinary judge—our friend Syme.

"Sonnet on hearing a thrush in a Morning Walk, 25th January, 1793."

Adieu, R. B.

TO MRS. WALTER RIDDELL,

IN FAVOUR OF A PLAYER'S BENEFIT.

[DUMFRIES, Feb. 1793.]

MADAM,

You were so very good as to promise me to honour my friend with your presence on his benefit-night. That night is fixed for Friday first: the play a most interesting one—"The Way to Keep Him." I have the pleasure to know Mr. G. well. His merit as an actor is generally acknowledged. He has genius and worth which would do honour to patronage: he is a poor and modest man; claims which from their very *silence* have the more forcible power on the generous heart. Alas, for pity! that from the indolence of those who have the good things of this life in their gift, too often does brazen-fronted importunity snatch that boon, the rightful due of retiring, humble want! Of all the qualities we assign to the Author and Director of Nature, by far the most enviable is—to be able "To wipe away all tears from all eyes." O what insignificant, sordid wretches are they, however chance may have loaded them with wealth, who go to their graves, to their magnificent *mausoleums*, with hardly the consciousness of having made one poor honest heart happy.

But I crave your pardon, Madam; I came to beg, not to preach.

R. B.

TO WILLIAM CREECH, ESQ.,

BOOKSELLER.

DUMFRIES, 28th Feb. 1793.

SIR,

I understand that my book is published; I beg that you will, as soon as possible, send me twenty copies of it. As I mean to present them among a few Great Folk whom I respect, and a few Little Folk whom I love, these twenty will not interfere with your sale. If you have not twenty copies ready, send me any number you can. It will confer a particular obligation to let me have them by first carrier.

I have the honour to be, Sir, your obedient, humble servant, R. B.

TO JOHN M'MURDO, ESQ.,

DRUMLANRIG.

DUMFRIES, March, 1793.

Will Mr. M'Murdo do me the favour to accept these volumes;[1] a trifling but sincere mark of the very high respect I bear for his worth as a man, his manners as a gentleman, and his kindness as a friend? However inferior now, or afterwards I may rank as a poet, one honest virtue, to which few poets can pretend, I trust I shall ever claim as mine;—to no man, whatever his station in life, or his power to serve me, have I ever paid a compliment at the expense of TRUTH.

THE AUTHOR.

TO THE EARL OF GLENCAIRN.

[DUMFRIES, March, 1793.]

MY LORD,

When you cast your eye on the name at the bottom of this letter, and on the title-page of the book[3] I do myself the honour to send your Lordship, a more pleasurable feeling than my vanity tells me, that it must be a name not entirely unknown to you. The generous patronage of your late illustrious brother found me in the utmost obscurity: he introduced my rustic muse to the partiality of my country; and to him I owe all. My sense of his goodness, and the anguish of my soul at losing my truly noble protector and friend, I have endeavoured to express in a poem to his memory, which I have now published. This edition is just from the press; and in my gratitude to the dead, and my respect for the living (Fame belies you, my Lord, if you possess not the same dignity of man, which was your noble brother's characteristic feature), I had destined a copy for the Earl of Glencairn. I learnt just now that you are in town:—allow me to present it you.

I know, my Lord, such is the vile, venal contagion which pervades the whole world of letters, that professions of respect from an author, particularly from a Poet to a Lord, are more than suspicious. I claim my by-past conduct, and my feelings at this moment, as exceptions to the too just conclusion. Exalted as are the honours of your Lordship's name, and unnoted as is the obscurity of mine, with the uprightness of an honest man, I come before your Lordship, with an offering, however humble—'tis all I have to give—of my grateful respect; and to beg of you, my Lord—'tis all I have to ask of you—that you will do me the honour to accept of it.

I have the honour to be, your Lordship's humble servant,

R. B

TO MRS. GRAHAM OF FINTRY.

DUMFRIES, March, 1793.

It is probable, Madam, that this page may be read when the hand that now writes it shall be mouldering in the dust: may it then bear witness that I present you these volumes as a tribute of gratitude, on my part ardent and sincere, as your and Mr. Graham's goodness to me has been generous and noble! May every child of yours, in the hour of need, find such a friend as I shall teach every child of mine that their father found in you!

R. B.[4]

[1] The edition of the poet's works published in 1793, in two small volumes.

[2] John, fifteenth earl, brother and successor of Lord James, the poet's patron. He died in 1796.

[3] The new edition of the poet's works.

[4] The above can hardly be considered a letter, in the ordinary sense of the word; it is, in fact, an inscription on a blank leaf of one of the volumes of the new edition of his poems.

TO ROBERT RIDDELL, ESQ.,
OF GLENRIDDELL.

DUMFRIES, March, 1793.

When you and I, my dear Sir, have passed that bourne whence no traveller returns, should these volumes survive us, I wish the future reader of this page to be informed that they are the pledge of Friendship, ardent and grateful on my part, as it was kind and generous on yours. That Enjoyment may mark your days, and Pleasure number your years is the earnest prayer of, my dear Sir,—your much indebted friend,

THE AUTHOR.[1]

TO MISS BENSON,
YORK.[2]

DUMFRIES, 21st March, 1793.

MADAM,

Among many things for which I envy those hale, long-lived old fellows before the flood, is this in particular, that when they met with any body after their own heart, they had a charming long prospect of many, many happy meetings with them in after-life.

Now in this short, stormy, winter day of our fleeting existence, when you now and then, in the Chapter of Accidents, meet an individual whose acquaintance is a real acquisition, there are all the probabilities against you, that you shall never meet with that valued character more. On the other hand, brief as this miserable being is, it is none of the least of the miseries belonging to it, that if there is any miscreant whom you hate, or creature whom you despise, the ill-run of the chances shall be so against you, that in the overtakings, turnings, and jostlings of life, pop, at some unlucky corner, eternally comes the wretch upon you, and will not allow your indignation or contempt a moment's repose. As I am a sturdy believer in the Powers of darkness, I take these to be the doings of that old author of mischief, the Devil. It is well known that he has some kind of short-hand way of taking down our thoughts, and I make no doubt that he is perfectly acquainted with my sentiments respecting Miss Benson: how much I admired her abilities and valued her worth, and how very fortunate I thought myself in her acquaintance. For this last reason, my dear Madam, I must entertain no hopes of the very great pleasure of meeting with you again.

Miss Hamilton[3] tells me that she is sending a packet to you, and I beg leave to send you the inclosed sonnet,[4] though, to tell you the real truth, the sonnet is a mere pretence, that I may have the opportunity of declaring with how much respectful esteem I have the honour to be, &c.

R. B.

TO THE

HON. THE PROVOST, BAILIES, AND TOWN COUNCIL OF DUMFRIES.

March, 1793.

GENTLEMEN,

The literary taste and liberal spirit of your good town has so ably filled the various departments of your schools, as to make it a very great object for a parent to have his children educated in them. Still, to me, a stranger, with my large family, and very stinted income, to give my young ones that education I wish, at the high-school fees which a stranger pays, will bear hard upon me.

That I may not appear altogether unworthy of this favour, allow me to state to you some little services I have done to a branch of your revenue. The two-pennies exigible on foreign ale vended within your limits—in this rather neglected article of your income, I am ready to show that, within these few weeks, my exertions have secured for you of those duties nearly the sum of Ten Pounds; and in this too, I was the only one of the gentlemen of the Excise (except Mr. Mitchell, whom *you pay* for his trouble) who took the least concern in the business.

Some years ago your good town did me the honour of making me an honorary Burgess.

[1] This is also an inscription on a blank page of a volume of the new edition of the poet's works.

[2] Afterwards Mrs. Basil Montagu, whose acquaintance the poet made under the hospitable roof of Mr. Craik of Arbigland.

[3] Daughter of Captain John Hamilton, the poet's landlord, and a relative of Mr. Craik of Arbigland.

[4] What the sonnet was is not stated in any edition.

Will you allow me to request that this mark of distinction may extend so far, as to put me on a footing of a real freeman of the town, in the schools?[1]

If you are so very kind as to grant my request, it will certainly be a constant incentive to me to strain every nerve where I can officially serve you; and will, if possible, increase that grateful respect with which I have the honour to be, Gentlemen, Your devoted humble Servant,

R. B.

TO MR. WHITE, TEACHER,

DUMFRIES ACADEMY

April, 1793.

Mr. White will accept of this book[2] as a mark of the most sincere Friendship from a man who has ever had too much respect for his Friends, and too much contempt for his enemies to flatter either the one or the other,

THE AUTHOR.

TO PATRICK MILLER, ESQ.,

OF DALSWINTON.

DUMFRIES, April, 1793.

SIR,

My poems have just come out in another edition,[3] will you do me the honour to accept of a copy? A mark of my gratitude to you, as a gentleman to whose goodness I have been much indebted; of my respect for you, as a patriot who, in a venal sliding age, stands forth the champion of the liberties of my country; and of my veneration for you, as a man, whose benevolence of heart does honour to human nature.

There *was* a time, Sir, when I was your dependant:[4] this language *then* would have been like the vile incense of flattery—I could not have used it.—Now that connexion is at an end, do me the honour to accept of this *honest* tribute of respect from, Sir, your much indebted humble servant,

R. B.

[1] It is gratifying to know, that the poet's request was at once complied with: Robert, then seven years old, was received into the burgh academy, and he, with two of his brothers, was receiving his education there when their father died.

[2] The new edition of his poems, on a blank leaf in the first volume of which the above is inscribed.

[3] Viz. an edition in two vols. small 8vo, published by Creech in 1793.

[4] Burns alludes to the time when he was tenant of Ellisland, of which Mr. Miller was landlord.

TO JOHN FRANCIS ERSKINE, ESQ.

OF MAR.[5]

DUMFRIES, 13th April, 1793.

SIR,

Degenerate as human nature is said to be—and in many instances, worthless and unprincipled it is—still there are bright examples to the contrary: examples that, even in the eyes of superior beings, must shed a lustre on the name of Man.

Such an example have I now before me, when you, Sir, came forward to patronise and befriend a distant obscure stranger, merely because poverty had made him helpless, and his British hardihood of mind had provoked the arbitrary wantonness of power. My much esteemed friend, Mr. Riddell of Glenriddell, has just read me a paragraph of a letter he had from you. Accept, Sir, of the silent throb of gratitude; for words would but mock the emotions of my soul.

You have been misinformed as to my final dismission from the Excise; I am still in the service.—Indeed, but for the exertions of a gentleman who must be known to you, Mr. Graham of Fintry, a gentleman who has ever been my warm and generous friend, I had, without so much as a hearing, or the slightest previous intimation, been turned adrift, with my helpless family, to all the horrors of want.

[5] "In consequence of the poet's freedom of remark on public measures, maliciously misrepresented to the Board of Excise, he was represented as actually dismissed from his office.—This report induced Mr. Erskine [in a letter to Capt. Riddell of Glenriddell] to propose a subscription in his favour, which was refused by the poet with that elevation of sentiment that peculiarly characterized his mind, and which is so happily displayed in this letter. See letter to R. Graham of Fintry, Dec. 1792, written by Burns, with even more than his accustomed pathos and eloquence in further explanation."—CROMEK.

Mr. Erskine of Mar, in consequence of the reversal of his grandfather's attainder, became Earl of Mar in 1824, but died in the following year, at the age of eighty-four. He was a staunch Whig in politics.

—Had I had any other resource, probably I might have saved them the trouble of a dismission; but the little money I gained by my publication, is almost every guinea embarked, to save from ruin an only brother,[1] who, though one of the worthiest, is by no means one of the most fortunate of men.

In my defence to their accusations, I said, that whatever might be my sentiments of republics, ancient or modern, as to Britain, I abjured the idea:—That a CONSTITUTION, which, in its original principles, experience had proved to be every way fitted for our happiness in society, it would be insanity to sacrifice to an untried visionary theory:—That in consideration of my being situated in a department, however humble, immediately in the hands of people in power, I had forborne taking any active part, either personally, or as an author, in the present business of REFORM. But that, where I must declare my sentiments, I would say there existed a system of corruption between the executive power and the representative part of the legislature, which boded no good to our glorious CONSTITUTION; and which every patriotic Briton must wish to see amended.—Some such sentiments as these, I stated in a letter to my generous patron Mr. Graham,[2] which he laid before the Board at large; where, it seems, my last remark gave great offence; and one of our supervisors general, a Mr. Corbet, was instructed to inquire on the spot, and to document me—"that my business was to act, *not to think;* and that whatever might be men or measures, it was for me to be *silent* and *obedient.*"

Mr. Corbet was likewise my steady friend; so between Mr. Graham and him, I have been partly forgiven; only I understand that all hopes of my getting officially forward are blasted.

Now, Sir, to the business in which I would more immediately interest you. The partiality of my COUNTRYMEN has brought me forward as a man of genius, and has given me a Character to support. In the POET I have avowed manly and independent sentiments, which I trust will be found in the MAN. Reasons of no less weight than the support of a wife and family, have pointed out as the eligible, and, situated as I was, the only eligible line of life for me, my present occupation. Still my honest fame is my dearest concern; and a thousand times have I trembled at the idea of those *degrading* epithets that Malice or Misrepresentation may affix to my name. I have often, in blasting anticipation, listened to some future hackney magazine scribbler, with the heavy malice of savage stupidity, exulting in his hireling paragraphs—"BURNS, notwithstanding the *fanfaronade* of Independence to be found in his works, and after having been held forth to public view, and to public estimation as a man of some genius, yet, quite destitute of resources within himself to support his borrowed dignity, he dwindled into a paltry Exciseman, and slunk out the rest of his insignificant existence in the meanest of pursuits, and among the vilest of mankind."

In your illustrious hands, Sir, permit me to lodge my disavowal and defiance of these slanderous falsehoods. BURNS was a poor man from birth, and an exciseman by necessity: but—*I will* say it! the sterling of his honest worth, no poverty could debase, and his independent British mind, oppression might bend, but could not subdue. Have not I, to me, a more precious stake in my country's welfare, than the richest dukedom in it?—I have a large family of children, and the prospect of many more. I have three sons, who, I see already, have brought into the world souls ill qualified to inhabit the bodies of SLAVES.—Can I look tamely on, and see any machination to wrest from them the birthright of my boys,—the little independent BRITONS, in whose veins runs my own blood?—No! I will not! should my heart's blood stream around my attempt to defend it!

Does any man tell me, that my feeble efforts can be of no service; and that it does not belong to my humble station to meddle with the concern of a people? I tell him, that it is on such individuals as I that for the hand of support, and the eye of intelligence a nation has to rest. The uninformed MOB may swell a nation's bulk; and the titled, tinsel, courtly throng, may be its feathered ornament; but the number of those who are elevated enough

[1] This statement is to some extent misleading. No doubt Burns did lend his brother some £180, but the larger share of what he gained by his poems disappeared during his stay at Ellisland.

[2] No doubt the letter of Jan. 3d to this gentleman.

in life to reason and to reflect, yet low enough to keep clear of the venal contagion of a court! —these are a nation's strength.

I know not how to apologise for the impertinent length of this epistle; but one small request I must ask of you farther—When you have honoured this letter with a perusal, please to commit it to the flames. BURNS, in whose behalf you have so generously interested yourself, I have here, in his native colours, drawn *as he is:* but should any of the people in whose hands is the very bread he eats, get the least knowledge of the picture, *it would ruin the poor* BARD *for ever!*

My poems have just come out in another edition, I beg leave to present you with a copy as a small mark of that high esteem and ardent gratitude, with which I have the honour to be, Sir, your deeply indebted, and ever devoted humble servant,

R. B.[1]

TO MR. PETER HILL, BOOKSELLER,

EDINBURGH.

DUMFRIES, April, 1793.

I would have written you sooner, my dear Friend; but as our Treasurer was out of town until to-day, I did not wish to write except I could write to the purpose. To-day, I believe, our T. remits you the cash; on Monday next our committee meet, when you shall have a new order.

I hope and trust that this unlucky blast which has overturned so many (and many worthy characters who, four months ago, little dreaded any such thing) will spare my Friend.

Oh! may the wrath and curse of all mankind haunt and harass these turbulent, unprincipled miscreants who have involved a People in this ruinous business!

I have not a moment more. Blessed be he that blesseth thee, and cursed be he that curseth thee! And the wretch whose envious malice would injure thee, may the Giver of every good and perfect gift say unto him, "Thou shalt not prosper!"

R. B.

TO MRS. RIDDELL,

WOODLEY PARK.[2]

Friday noon [April, 1793].

. . . Had Fate put it in my power any way to have added one comfort to your existence, it could not, perhaps, have done anything which would have gratified me more. . . . In order that you may have the higher idea of my merits in this momentous affair, I must tell you that all the haberdashers here are on the alarm as to the necessary article of French gloves. You must know that French gloves are contraband goods, and expressly forbidden by the laws of this wise-governed realm of ours. A satirist would say this is the reason why the ladies are so fond of them; but I, who have not one grain of *gall* in my composition, shall allege that it is the patriotism of the dear goddesses of man's idolatry that makes them so fond of dress from the Land of Liberty and Equality. . . . On the very respectable character of a revenue officer, three of the principal [glove] merchants had been subpœnaed before the Court of Exchequer (a crabbed law expression for being ruined in a revenue court). . . . Still I have discovered one haberdasher who, at my particular request, will clothe your fair hands as they ought to

[1] The above letter was copied by Burns into the Glenriddell collection, where it is prefaced with the following note:—

"In the year 1792-93 when Royalist and Jacobin had set all Britain by the ears—because I unguardedly, rather under the temptation of being witty than disaffected, had declared my sentiments in favour of Parliamentary Reform, in the manner of that time, I was accused to the Board of Excise of being a Republican, and was very near being turned adrift in the wide world on that account. Mr. Erskine of Mar, a *gentleman* indeed, wrote to my friend Glenriddell to know if I was really out of place on account of my political principles, and if so, he proposed a subscription among the friends of Liberty for me, which he offered to head, that I might be no pecuniary loser by my political Integrity. This was the more generous, as I had not the honour of being known to Mr. Erskine. I wrote to him as follows."

[2] This fragmentary epistle was extracted by Dr. Hately Waddell from a catalogue issued by Waller of Fleet Street, London, and published in his edition of the poet's *Life and Works* (1869). It was headed in the catalogue by the following note:—

"Two pages of this admirable and characteristic letter are devoted to strictures upon French gloves—the fair lady to whom it was written having stated to the poet that she could not exist without French gloves."

be, to keep them from being profaned by the rude gaze of the gloating eye, or—horrid! from perhaps a — by the unhallowed lips of the Satyr Man. . . .

So much for this important matter. I have received a long letter from Mr. Thomson, who presides over the publication of Scotch music, &c., which I mentioned to you. Would you honour the publication with a song from you? I have just sent him a new song to "The Last Time I came o'er the Moor," but I don't know if I have succeeded.[1] I enclose it for your strictures. Mary was the name I intended my heroine to bear, but I altered it to your ladyship's, as being infinitely more musical. . . .

R. B.

TO MRS. RIDDELL.

April, 1793.]

I have often told you, my dear friend, that you had a spice of caprice in your composition, and you have as often disavowed it; even perhaps while your opinions were, at the moment, irrefragably proving it. Could *any thing* estrange me from a friend such as you?—No! To-morrow I shall have the honour of waiting on you.

Farewell, thou first of friends, and most accomplished of women! even with all thy little caprices!

R. B.

TO MR. ROBERT AINSLIE.

[April 26, 1793.]

I am d—nably out of humour, my dear Ainslie, and that is the reason why I take up my pen to *you;* 'tis the nearest way (*probatum est*) to recover my spirits again.

I received your last, and was much entertained with it; but I will not at this time, nor at any other time, answer it.—Answer a letter! I never could answer a letter in my life!—I have written many a letter in return for letters I have received; but then they were original matter—spurt-away! zig here, zag there; as if the devil (wi' an ay Grannie, an old woman indeed! often told me, rode on will-o'-wisp) or, in her more classic phrase, SPUNKIE, were looking over my elbow.—Happy thought that idea has engendered in my head! SPUNKIE—thou shalt henceforth be my symbol, signature, and tutelary Genius! Like thee, hap-step-and-lowp, here-awa-there-awa, higglety-pigglety, pell-mell, hither-and-yon, ram-stam, happy-go-lucky, up-tails-a'-by-the-light-o'-the-moon; has been, is, and shall be, my progress through the mosses and moors of this vile, bleak, barren wilderness of a life of ours.

Come then, my guardian Spirit! like thee, may I skip away, amusing myself by, and at my own light: and if any opaque-souled lubber of mankind complain that my elfin, lambent, glimmerous wanderings have misled his stupid steps over precipices, or into bogs; let the thick-headed blunderbuss recollect, that he is not SPUNKIE:—that,

> SPUNKIE'S wanderings could not copied be;
> Amid these perils none durst walk but he.

I feel vastly better. I give you joy. . . . I have no doubt but scholarcraft may be caught as a Scotchman catches the itch,—by friction. How else can you account for it, that born blockheads, by mere dint of *handling* books, grow so wise that even they themselves are equally convinced of and surprised at their own parts? I once carried this philosophy to that degree that in a knot of country folks who had a library amongst them, and who, to the honour of their good sense, made me factotum in the business; one of our members, a little, wise-looking, squat, upright, jabbering body of a tailor, I advised him, instead of turning over the leaves, *to bind the book on his back.*—Johnnie took the hint; and as our meetings were every fourth Saturday, and Pricklouse having a good Scots mile to walk in coming, and, of course, another in returning, Bodkin was sure to lay his hand on some heavy quarto, or ponderous folio, with, and under which, wrapt up in his grey plaid, he grew wise as he grew weary, all the way home. He carried this so far, that an old musty Hebrew concordance, which we had in a present from a neighbouring priest, by mere dint of applying it, as doctors do a blistering plaster, between his

[1] See song beginning:—

> 'The last time I came o'er the moor,
> And left Maria's dwelling.

[See vol. iii. p. 149.]

shoulders, Stitch, in a dozen pilgrimages, acquired as much rational theology as the said priest had done by forty years' perusal of the pages.

Tell me, and tell me truly, what you think of this theory. Yours,

SPUNKIE.[1]

TO MISS LESLEY BAILLIE,

OF MAYFIELD.[2]

[DUMFRIES, End of May, 1793.]

MADAM,

I have just put the last hand to the enclosed song, and I think that I may say of it, as Nature can say of you:—"*There* is a work of mine, finished in my very finest style."

Among your sighing swains, if there should be one whose ardent sentiment and ingenuous modesty fetter his power of speech in your presence; with that look and attitude so native to your manner, and of all others the most bewitching—beauty listening to compassion—put my ballad in the poor fellow's hand, just to give a little breathing to the fervour of his soul.[3]

I have some pretence, Madam, to make you the theme of my song, as you and I are two downright singularities in human nature. You will probably start at this assertion; but I believe it will be allowed that a woman exquisitely charming, without the least seeming consciousness of it, and a poet who never paid a compliment but where it was justly due, are two of the greatest rarities on earth. I have the honour to be, &c.,

R. B.

[1] This is the last letter by Burns to Ainslie that we possess. In a letter to Clarinda (Mrs. M'Lehose) dated July 25th, 1794 (his last to this lady), the poet says: "My old friend Ainslie has indeed been kind to you. I had a letter from him a while ago, but it was so dry, so distant, so like a card to one of his clients, that I could scarce bear to read it, and have not yet answered it." See the letter to Clarinda. A biographical notice of Ainslie will be found at page 63.

[2] Miss Baillie became in June, 1799, the wife of Robert Cumming, Esq., of Logie.

[3] The song referred to is that beginning:—

Blythe hae I been on yon hill,
As the lambs before me, &c. [See vol. iii. p. 149.

The song "O saw ye bonnie Lesley," vol. iii. p. 128, was inspired by this young lady, "a charming Ayrshire girl," to use the poet's own expression when sending the song to Thomson.

TO MISS M'MURDO,

DRUMLANRIG.

DUMFRIES, July, 1793.

MADAM,

Amid the profusion of compliments and addresses which your age, sex and accomplishments will now bring you, permit me to approach with my *devoirs*, which, however deficient may be their consequence in other respects, have the double novelty and merit in these frivolous, hollow times, of being poetic and sincere. In the inclosed ballad I have, I think, hit off a few outlines of your portrait. The personal charms, the purity of mind, the ingenuous *naïveté* of heart and manners in my heroine are, I flatter myself, a pretty just likeness of Miss M'Murdo in a cottage. Every composition of this kind must have a series of dramatic incidents in it, so I have had recourse to my invention to finish the rest of my ballad.[4]

So much from the poet. Now let me add a few wishes which every man who has himself the honour of being a father must breathe when he sees female youth, beauty, and innocence about to enter into this chequered, and very precarious world. May you, my young Madam, escape that frivolity which threatens universally to pervade the minds and manners of fashionable life, though it may pass by the rougher and more degenerate sex. The mob of fashionable female youth, what are they? are they anything? They prattle, laugh, sing, dance, finger a lesson, or perhaps turn over the parts of a fashionable novel, but are their minds stored with any information worthy of the noble powers of reason and judgment? or do their hearts glow with sentiment, ardent, generous or humane? Were I to poetise on the subject, I would call them the butterflies of the human kind, remarkable only for, and distinguished only by, the idle variety of their ordinary glare, sillily straying from one blossoming weed to another, without a meaning and without an aim, the idiot prey of every pirate of the skies who thinks them worth his while as he wings his way by them, and speedily by wintry time swept to that oblivion whence they might as well never have appeared.

[4] The song inclosed was that beginning:—

There was a lass, and she was fair,
At kirk and market to be seen, &c. [See vol. iii. p. 151.

Amid this crowd of nothings may you, Madam, be something—may yours be a character dignified; a rational and immortal being.

A still more formidable plague in life—unfeeling, interested selfishness, is a contagion too impure to touch you. The selfish drift to bless yourself alone, to build your fame on another's ruin, to look on the child of misfortune without commiseration, or even the victim of folly without pity—these, and every other feature of a heart rotten at the core, are what you are totally incapable of.

These wishes, Madam, are of no consequence to you, but to me they are of the utmost, as they give me an opportunity of declaring with what respect I have the honour to be, &c.

R. B.

TO JOHN M'MURDO, ESQ.,

OF DRUMLANRIG.

DUMFRIES [July, 1793].

SIR,

There is a beautiful, simple, little Scots air which Mr. Clarke[1] tells me has the good fortune to meet your approbation, and which he says he has taught to your young ladies, together with the rudiments of a Song which I intended to suit the tune. That Ballad I enclose finished, and, in my own opinion, in my best style; and I now beg leave to present to Miss M'Murdo the composition, as I think I have made it worthy, in some degree, of the subject. She, I from the beginning meant for the Heroine of it.

Sincere respect, Sir, even from those who can bestow nothing else, or who are themselves of no consequence as folk of the world,—such respect and tribute of the heart is an offering grateful to every mind. You know that it is a tribute I never pay but in the willing ardour of my soul. Kings give Coronets—alas! I can only bestow a Ballad. Still, however, I proudly claim superiority even over Monarchs; my presents, so far as I am a Poet, are the presents of Genius; and as the gifts of R. Burns, they are the gifts of respectful gratitude to the Worthy. I assure you I am not a little flattered with the idea when I anticipate children pointing out in future publications the tributes of respect I have bestowed on their Mothers. The merits of the Scots airs to which many of my Songs are—and more will be—set, give me this pleasing hope.

You I believe are a Subscriber to that splendid edition of Scots Music in which Pleyel presides over the musical department. In a future number of that Work (the first number is already published) this Ballad will probably appear.

I have the honour to be, Sir, your obliged, humble servt.,

R. B.

[1] Mr. Stephen Clarke, organist, and musical editor of Johnson's *Museum*, was in Dumfriesshire, giving musical lessons to, among others, the Misses Jean and Philadelphia M'Murdo. The ballad spoken of in this letter will be found at p. 151, vol. iii.

[TO GAVIN HAMILTON, ESQ.,

WRITER, MAUCHLINE.][2]

DUMFRIES, 10th July, 1793.

MY DEAR SIR,

I understand that our friend, Mrs. Muir,[3] of Tarbolton Mill, is likely to be involved in great difficulties as to the Settlement the late Miller made. Will you be so obliging as to let me know the state of the case; and if you think it would answer any good purpose to advocate the cause to Edinburgh at once, I can answer for her—a Writer to the Signet, an intimate friend of mine will cheerfully undertake the business, without a single sixpence of fees; and our countryman, David Catheart, lies under promise to me to advocate at small expense whenever I represent female poverty in distress. I am much interested for her, and will, as far as I have interest in either, move heaven and earth in her behalf. My interest in the first is vastly improved since you and I were first acquainted. Oh, there is nothing like Matrimony for setting a man's face Zionward; whether it be that it sublimates a man above the visible diurnal sphere, or

[2] The name and address have been torn off from the original MS., the above being conjecturally supplied.

[3] Wife of the recently deceased William Muir, whose epitaph will be found at p. 220, vol. i., and who occupied the "Willie's Mill" of "Death and Dr. Hornbook." It was in their house that "Jean" found shelter during her second pregnancy when her father drove her from home.

whether it tires him of this sublunary state, or whether the delicious morsel of happiness which he enjoys in the conjugal yoke gives him a longing for the feasts above, or whether a poor husband thinks he has every chance in his favour, as, should he go to hell, he can be no worse—I shall leave a weel-waled [well-selected] Presbytery of orthodox Ayrshire priests to determine. Yours most sincerely,

R. B.

[TO JOHN M'MURDO, ESQ.,
DRUMLANRIG.][1]

[August, 1793.]

. . . . . .

This is a painful disagreeable letter, and the first of the kind I ever wrote. I am truly in serious distress for three or four guineas; can you, my dear Sir, accommodate me? These accursed times by tripping up importation, have, for this year at least, lopped off a full third of my income; and with my large family this is to me a distressing matter.[2] . . .

TO CAPTAIN MILLER,
DALSWINTON.[3]

[DUMFRIES, September, 1793.]

DEAR SIR,

The following ode[4] is on a subject which I know you by no means regard with indifference. Oh, Liberty,

Thou mak'st the gloomy face of nature gay,
Giv'st beauty to the sun, and pleasure to the day.

It does me so much good to meet with a man whose honest bosom glows with the generous enthusiasm, the heroic daring of liberty, that I could not forbear sending you a composition of my own on the subject, which I really think is in my best manner. I have the honour to be, dear Sir, &c.

R. B.

TO MR. JAMES JOHNSON,
ENGRAVER, EDINBURGH.

[DUMFRIES, Oct. 1793.]

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I [have not lately had an opportunity] of writing you; your songs much [occupy my thoughts, but I am worried by un]avoidable hurry. I am [now busy] correcting a new edition [of my poems, and] this, with my ordinary [business finds me] in full employment.

[At your leisure, if you] choose, get somebody to class the first lines of the songs alphabetically, and I will draw out an Index of Author's names, as soon as you send the list, and return [corrected proofs of the songs].

A valued musical acquaintance of [mine in the neighbourhood] of Ayr is thinking [of publishing a] Collection of Strathspeys and Reels. [I have recommended him to you in this matter. Engage with him on the] same terms as you would another; but as you will be promptly paid, let him have your lowest terms. Write to me as to this matter in a post or two at farthest.

As to our *Musical Museum* I have better than a dozen songs by me for the fifth volume. Send with Mr. Clarke, when he comes to you [whatever new airs you have] got. If we cannot finish the fifth volume any other way, what would you think of Scotch words to some beautiful Irish airs? In the meantime, at your leisure, give a copy of the *Museum* to my worthy friend, Mr. Peter Hill, Bookseller, to bind for me, interleaved with blank leaves, exactly as he did the Laird of Glenriddell's that I [may insert every anecdote I can learn together with my own criticisms and remarks on the songs. A copy of this kind I shall leave with you, the editor, to publish at some

[1] The original MS. of this note has neither date nor superscription. It seems very likely, however, that Mr. M'Murdo was the friend to whom the poet applied for the loan: see letter to this gentleman, December, 1793. In the July previous to the supposed despatch of the above, Burns had written George Thomson an indignant letter for sending him five pounds as some recompense for his songs. Strange that he should rather humble himself to be a borrower than accept of money from a man willing to give it him for his valuable literary services.

[2] The country had now been engaged about four or five months in the war with France, and it was a time of general difficulty and distress, owing to the disturbance which the war created in the usual course of commerce, and the additional burdens it threw on the people. Burns suffered amongst the rest, for it stopped an extra source of income which he derived from the unloading of foreign vessels.

[3] Son of Patrick Miller, Esq., the poet's landlord while at Ellisland.

[4] "Bruce's Address."

after period, by way of making the *Museum* a book famous to the end of time, and you renowned for ever. In haste, yours,

R. B.][1]

TO MR. JAMES JOHNSON,

EDINBURGH.

[DUMFRIES, Oct. 1793.]

I was much obliged to you, my dear Friend, for making me acquainted with Gow.[2] He is a modest, intelligent, worthy fellow; besides his being a man of great genius in his way. I have spent many happy hours with him, in the short while he has been here.

Why did you not send me those tunes and verses that Clarke and you cannot make out? Let me have them as soon as possible, that while he is at hand, I may settle the matter with him. He and I have been very busy providing and laying out materials for your fifth volume. I have got about a dozen by me. If you can conveniently, let me have half a dozen copies of your fourth volume: I want no more. As soon as the bound copy of all the volumes is ready, take the trouble of forwarding it. In haste, yours ever,

R. B.

TO MRS. RIDDELL,

WOODLEY PARK.

Nov. 1793.

I will wait on you, my ever valued friend, but whether in the morning I am not sure. Sunday closes a period of our curst revenue business, and may probably keep me employed with my pen until noon. Fine employment for a poet's pen! There is a species of the human genus that I call *the gin-horse class*: what enviable dogs they are! Round, and round, and round they go.—Mundell's ox, that drives his cotton mill, is their exact prototype—without an idea or wish beyond their circle; fat, sleek, stupid, patient, quiet, and contented; while here I sit, altogether Novemberish, a damned melange of fretfulness and melancholy; not enough of the one to rouse me to passion, nor of the other to repose me in torpor; my soul flouncing and fluttering round her tenement, like a wild finch, caught amid the horrors of winter, and newly thrust into a cage. Well, I am persuaded that it was of me the Hebrew sage prophesied, when he foretold—"And behold, on whatsoever this man doth set his heart, it shall not prosper!" If my resentment is awaked, it is sure to be where it dare not squeak; and if—

. . . . . .

Pray that wisdom and bliss be more frequent visitors of

R. B.

TO MRS. RIDDELL,

WOODLEY PARK.

[November, 1793.]

DEAR MADAM,

I meant to have called on you yesternight, but as I edged up to your box-door, the first object which greeted my view, was one of those lobster-coated puppies, sitting like another dragon, guarding the Hesperian fruit.[3] On the conditions and capitulations you so obligingly offer, I shall certainly make my weather-beaten rustic phiz a part of your box-furniture on Tuesday; when we may arrange the business of the visit.

. . . . . .

Among the profusion of idle compliments,

[1] The above fragmentary letter was first published in Paterson's Library Edition of Burns [Edinburgh, 1879], accompanied by the following note:—

"The original document is a patched and pasted fragment—part of the Hastie collection in the British Museum. The short insertions within brackets are here put in by conjecture to supply words eaten away from the manuscript. The longer passage at the end within brackets, is supplied from Cromek, who printed it as a portion of another letter to Johnson of later date."

[2] Probably a brother of Neil Gow, the famous violinist.

[3] A regiment was stationed at this time in Dumfries, and the officers were, as usual, full of the gushing loyalty of the day. Burns, dissenting from much that was involved in the loyalty, disliked those by whom it was often obtrusively expressed. He also conceived that he had just reason for believing that it was owing to reports from these gentlemen that his good affection to the government had been called in question by the Board of Excise. Added to this there was, perhaps, on the poet's part a little jealous suspicion, that these dandified officers were receiving more of the charming lady's attentions than fell to his share.

which insidious craft, or unmeaning folly, incessantly offer at your shrine—a shrine, how far exalted above such adoration—permit me, were it but for rarity's sake, to pay you the honest tribute of a warm heart and an independent mind; and to assure you, that I am, thou most amiable, and most accomplished of thy sex, with the most respectful esteem, and fervent regard, thine, &c.

R. B.

TO MISS FONTENELLE,

DUMFRIES THEATRE.

[2d Decr. 1793.]

Enclosed is the Address,[1] such as it is, and may it be a prologue to an overflowing house. If all the town put together have half the ardour for your success and welfare of my individual wishes, my prayer will most certainly be granted.

R. B.

TO CAPTAIN ———.[2]

DUMFRIES, 5th Dec. 1793.

SIR,

Heated as I was with wine yesternight, I was perhaps rather seemingly impertinent in my anxious wish to be honoured with your acquaintance. You will forgive it; it was the impulse of heart-felt respect. "He is the father of the Scottish county reform, and is a man who does honour to the business at the same time that the business does honour to him," said my worthy friend Glenriddell to somebody by me who was talking of your coming to this country with your corps. "Then," I said, "I have a woman's longing to take him by the hand, and say to him, 'Sir, I honour you as a man to whom the interests of humanity are dear, and as a patriot to whom the rights of your country are sacred.'"

In times like these, Sir, when our commoners are barely able by the glimmering of their own twilight understandings to scrawl a frank, and when lords are what gentlemen would be ashamed to be, to whom shall a sinking country call for help? To the independent country gentleman. To him who has too deep a stake in his country not to be in earnest for her welfare; and who in the honest pride of man can view with equal contempt the insolence of office and the allurements of corruption.

I mentioned to you a Scots ode or song I had lately composed, and which I think has some merit.[3] Allow me to inclose it. When I fall in with you at the theatre, I shall be glad to have your opinion of it. Accept of it, Sir, as a very humble but most sincere tribute of respect from a man who, dear as he prizes poetic fame, yet holds dearer an independent mind. I have the honour to be,

R. B.

TO ALEXANDER FRASER TYTLER,

ESQ., EDINBURGH.

[6th Decr. 1793.]

SIR,

A poor caitiff, driving as I am at this moment with an excise quill, at the rate of "Devil take the hindmost," is ill-qualified to round the period of gratitude or swell the pathos of sensibility. Gratitude, like some other amiable qualities of the mind, is now-a-days so abused by impostors, that I have sometimes wished that the project of that sly dog, Momus, I think it is, had gone into effect—planting a window in the breast of man. In that case, when a poor fellow comes, as I do at this moment, before his benefactor, tongue-tied with the sense of these very obligations, he would have nothing to do but place himself in front of his friend, and lay bare the workings of his bosom.

I again trouble you with another, and my last, parcel of manuscript. I am not interested in any of these; blot them at your pleasure. I am much indebted to you for taking the

[1] This was the prologue for Miss Fontenelle's benefit night (4th Dec.), commencing:

> Still anxious to secure your partial favour,
> And not less anxious, sure, this night than ever.

See vol. iii. p. 165.

[2] This letter was originally published in Mr. Robert Chambers's collection of Scottish songs. The editor of that work conjectures it to have been addressed to Captain Robertson of Lude.

[3] The inclosed ode was "Bruce's Address to his Army at Bannockburn."

trouble of correcting the press-work.[1] One instance, indeed, may be rather unlucky; if the lines to Sir John Whitefoord are to be printed: they ought to end—

> And tread the *shadowy* path to that dark world unknown.

"shadowy," instead of "dreary," as I believe it stands at present. I wish this could be noticed in the Errata. This comes of writing, as I generally do, from the memory.

I have the honour to be, Sir, your deeply indebted humble servant,

R. B.

TO JOHN M'MURDO, ESQ.

DUMFRIES, Dec. 1793.

SIR,

It is said that we take the greatest liberties with our greatest friends, and I pay myself a very high compliment in the manner in which I am going to apply the remark. I have owed you money longer than ever I owed it to any man.—Here is Ker's account, and here are six guineas; and now, I don't owe a shilling to man—or woman either. But for these damned dirty, dog's-ear'd little pages,[2] I had done myself the honour to have waited on you long ago. Independent of the obligations your hospitality has laid me under, the consciousness of your superiority, in the rank of man and gentleman, of itself was fully as much as I could ever make head against: but to owe you money, too, was more than I could face.

I think I once mentioned something of a collection of Scots songs I have for some years been making: I send you a perusal of what I have got together. I could not conveniently spare them above five or six days, and five or six glances of them will probably more than suffice you. A very few of them are my own. When you are tired of them, please leave them with Mr. Clint, of the King's Arms. There is not another copy of the collection in the world; and I should be sorry that any unfortunate negligence should deprive me of what has cost me a good deal of pains.[3]

R. B.

[1] Creech was about this date preparing to publish the last edition of Burns's works which appeared during his lifetime, namely that of 1794 in 2 vols. Mr. Fraser Tytler had undertaken to make some slight alterations in the poems, and to correct the proof-sheets.

[2] Scottish bank-notes.

[3] The "collection" here referred to was one which Burns had taken the trouble of gathering and transcribing into a book. It consisted of loose but humourous Scotch songs which he happened from time to time to pick up, along with others in the same vein contributed by himself. "Unluckily," says Robert Chambers, "Burns's collection of these facetiæ, including his own essays in the same walk, fell after his death into the hands of one of those publishers who would sacrifice the highest interests of humanity to put an additional penny into their own purses; and, to the lasting grief of all the friends of our poet, they were allowed the honours of the press." The volume which thus came into existence, and which rarely meets the light of day, is known by the title of the *Merry Muses of Caledonia*. Chambers, while not excusing Burns, is disposed to palliate his conduct in thus adding to the already sufficiently large stock of this kind of literature, on the ground that he was led into it "by his enthusiastic love of all the forms of his country's elder muse;" and some allowance may be made to him on that score. George Gilfillan describes the *Merry Muses* as being "rank throughout with the miasma of uncleanness. . . . But its very vileness prevents it from being noxious; it kindles no feeling but disgust, awakens no passion but anger, or rather grief disgust at the volume itself, grief for the author." He also quotes what Lord Byron said about certain of Burns's letters that had come under his notice, namely, that they were "so abominably gross and elaborately coarse that I do not believe they could be paralleled in our language." While on this subject we may remark that Burns, it seems to us, has often got too much credit for purifying the songs of his native country. That he did substitute decent for indecent verses in a number of cases is quite true, but this was in order to suit the character of the musical works for which he was writing, and to meet the public taste, which would no longer tolerate the looser class of lyrics. There were many songs before Burns's day as innocent as they were excellent; and to those of a less moral kind Burns, as we see, had no objection to contribute his quota. Indeed, in his next letter he acknowledges his own "violent propensity to bawdry." In writing to Thomson even he occasionally sent a piece at which this staid and highly respectable gentleman must have been greatly shocked. In connection with Burns's contributions to scandalous literature, Mr. Scott Douglas remarks:—"We have seen many of our poet's holograph copies of his own performances in that way, and they seem to have been transmitted to his Edinburgh fellows of the social club referred to [the 'Crochallan Fencibles'], by the hands of Robert Cleghorn, farmer, Saughton Mills, to whom they are generally found to be addressed. These effusions were sometimes accompanied by prose communications, of which the following [the next two letters in our text] may be given as a sample."

TO MR. ROBERT CLEGHORN,

SAUGHTON MILLS.

I have just bought a quire of post, and I am determined, my dear Cleghorn, to give you the maidenhead of it. Indeed that is all my reason for, and all that I can propose to give you by, this present scrawl. From my late hours last night, and the dripping fogs and damned east wind of this stupid day, I have left me as little soul as an oyster—"Sir John, you are so fretful, you cannot live long"—"why, there is it! Come, sing me a bawdy song to make me merry!!"

ACT SEDERUNT O' THE SESSION.

TUNE—"*O'er the Muir amang the Heather.*"

. . . . . .

Well, the Law is good for something, since we can make a bawdy song out of it. (N. B. I never made anything of it any other way.) There is—there must be some truth in original sin. My violent propensity to bawdry convinces me of it. Lack a day! if that species of compostion be the special sin, never-to-be-forgiven in this world, nor in that which is to come, "I am the most offending soul alive." Mair for token, a fine chiel—a hand-waled friend and crony o' my ain, gat o'er the lugs in love wi' a braw, fodgel hizzie frae the English side, weel kenn'd i' the burgh of Annan by the name o' "Bonnie Mary;" and I tauld the tale as follows: (N. B.—The chorus is auld).

COME COWE ME, MINNIE, COME COWE ME.

TUNE.—"*My Minnie's aye glowerin o'er me.*"

. . . . . .

Forgive this wicked scrawl. Thine in all the sincerity of a brace of honest Port.

R. B.

TO MR. ROBERT CLEGHORN,

SAUGHTON MILLS.

My best compliments to Mrs. Cleghorn, and all your friends of my acquaintance. Many happy returns of the season to you, my worthy Sir, and (pardon me) your fully as worthy bedfellow. The foregoing poem is for her. For you, I make a present of the following new edition of an old Cloacinian song, a species of composition which I have heard you admire, and a kind of song which I know you wanted much. It is sung to an old tune, something like "Tak your auld cloak about ye."

There was twa wives, and twa witty wives,
Sat o'er a stowp o' brandy, &c. &c.

. . . . . .

God speed the plough, and send a good seed time! Amen! Farewell!

R. B.

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

15th December, 1793.[1]

MY DEAR FRIEND,

As I am in a complete Decemberish humour, gloomy, sullen, stupid, as even the Deity of Dulness herself could wish, I shall not drawl out a heavy letter with a number of heavier apologies for my late silence. Only one I shall mention, because I know you will sympathize in it: these four months, a sweet little girl, my youngest child, has been so ill, that every day, a week or less threatened to terminate her existence.[2] There had much need be many pleasures annexed to the states of husband and father, for, God knows, they have many peculiar cares. I cannot describe to you the anxious, sleepless hours these ties have frequently given me. I see a train of helpless little folk; me and my exertions all their stay; and on what a brittle thread does the life of man hang! If I am nipt off at the command of fate, even in all the vigour of manhood as I am—such things happen every day—Gracious God! what would become of my little flock! 'Tis here that I envy your people of fortune. —A father on his death-bed, taking an everlasting leave of his children, has indeed woe

[1] Dr. Currie gives this date as December, 1795, but that this is incorrect will appear from the following note.

[2] This refers to Elizabeth Riddell Burns, at the above given date "the youngest child" *of* the poet; had the date been 1795, as given by Currie, James Glencairn Burns would have been the youngest child. Elizabeth died in Sept. 1795, more than three months before Currie's date. Nor in December, 1795, would Burns have described himself as "in all the vigour of manhood."

enough; but the man of competent fortune leaves his sons and daughters independency and friends; while I—but I shall run distracted if I think any longer on the subject!

To leave talking of the matter so gravely, I shall sing with the old Scots ballad—

O that I had ne'er been married,
I would never had nae care;
Now I've gotten wife and bairns,
They cry crowdie evermair.

Crowdie ance; crowdie twice;
Crowdie three times in a day;
An' ye crowdie ony mair,
Ye'll crowdie a' my meal away.

December, 24th.

We have had a brilliant theatre here this season; only, as all other business has, it experiences a stagnation of trade from the epidemical complaint of the country—*want of cash*. I mention our theatre merely to lug in an occasional Address which I wrote for the benefit-night of one of the actresses, which is as follows:

ADDRESS,

SPOKEN BY MISS FONTENELLE ON HER BENEFIT-NIGHT, DECEMBER 4, 1793.[1]

25th, Christmas Morning.

This, my much-loved friend, is a morning of wishes; accept mine—so Heaven hear me as they are sincere! that blessings may attend your steps, and affliction know you not! In the charming words of my favourite author, "The Man of Feeling," "May the Great Spirit bear up the weight of thy grey hairs, and blunt the arrow that brings them rest!"

Now that I talk of authors, how do you like Cowper?[2] Is not the "Task" a glorious poem? The religion of the "Task," batin;' a few scraps of Calvinistic divinity, is the religion of God and Nature; the religion that exalts, that ennobles man. Were not you to send me your "Zeluco," in return for mine? Tell me how you like my marks and notes through the book. I would not give a farthing for a book unless I were at liberty to blot it with my criticisms.

I have lately collected, for a friend's perusal, all my letters; I mean those which I first sketched in a rough draught, and afterwards wrote out fair. On looking over some old musty papers, which, from time to time, I had parcelled by, as trash that were scarce worth preserving, and which yet at the same time I did not care to destroy; I discovered many of these rude sketches, and have written, and am writing them out, in a bound MS. for my friend's library.[3] As I wrote always to you the rhapsody of the moment, I cannot find a single scroll to you except one, about the commencement of our acquaintance. If there were any possible conveyance, I would send you a perusal of my book.

R. B.

TO ROBERT GRAHAM, ESQ.,

OF FINTRY.

DUMFRIES, Jan. 1794.

SIR,

I am going to venture on a subject which, I am afraid, may appear, *from me*, improper; but as I do it from the best of motives, if you should not approve of my ideas, you will forgive them.

Economy of the public monies is, I know, highly the wish of your honourable board; and any hint conducive thereto which may occur to any, though the meanest individual in your service, it is surely his duty to communicate it.

I have been myself accustomed to labour, and have no notion that a servant of the public

[1] See the Address, p. 165, vol. iii.

[2] "Burns generally carried Cowper's 'Task' in his pocket, and took it out when he found himself in a lonely road, or in a brew-house, where he had to wait sometimes to 'gauge the browst.' The copy which he used was one lent to him by Mrs. Dunlop; he enriched the margins with notes, critical and commendatory, and from the number of the marks and the frequency of the praise it appears that the English bard was a great favourite. This precious volume was, after the death of the poet, placed in the library at Dunlop; but the family carrying it with them one winter to Edinburgh, it was unfortunately destroyed by fire, along with other volumes which had been in the hands of Burns, and which attested equally his feelings and his taste."—CUNNINGHAM.

[3] If crowning proof were wanting that the date given by Currie to this letter is incorrect, it is here supplied. The poet is here alluding to the Glenriddell collection of letters we have already had frequent occasion to refer to. Now, Robert Riddell, the "friend" mentioned above, died in April, 1794.

should eat the bread of idleness; so, what I have long digested, and am going to propose, is the reduction of one of our Dumfries divisions. Not only in these unlucky times, but even in the highest flush of business, my division, though by far the heaviest, was mere trifling—the others, still less. I would plan the reduction as thus: Let the second division be annihilated, and be divided among the others. The duties in it are two chandlers, a common brewer, and some victuallers; these, with some tea and spirit stocks, are the whole division. The two chandlers I would give to the third or tobacco division; it is the idlest of us all. That I may seem impartial, I shall willingly take under my charge the common brewer and the victuallers. The tea and spirit stocks divide between the Bridgend and Dumfries second divisions. They have at present but very little, *comparatively*, to do, and are quite adequate to the task.

I assure you, Sir, that by my plan the duties will be equally well discharged, and thus an officer's appointment saved to the public. You must remark one thing—that our common brewers are, every man of them in Dumfries completely and unexceptionably, fair traders. One or two rascally creatures are in the Bridgend division; but besides being nearly ruined, as all smugglers deserve, by fines and forfeitures, their business is on the most trifling scale you can fancy.

I must beg of you, Sir, should my plan please you, that you will conceal my hand in it, and give it as your own thought. My warm and worthy friend, Mr. Corbet, may think me an impertinent intermeddler in his department; and Mr. Findlater, my supervisor, who is not only one of the first, if not the very first, of excisemen in your service, but is also one of the worthiest fellows in the universe: he, I know, would feel hurt at it, and as he is one of my most intimate friends, you can easily figure how it would place me to have my plan known to him.

For further information on the subject, permit me to refer you to a young beginner whom you lately sent among us—Mr. Andrew Pearson, a gentleman that I am happy to say, from manner, abilities, and attention, promises indeed, to be a great acquisition to the service of your honourable board.

This is a letter of business; in a future opportunity I may, and most certainly will, trouble you with one in my own way, *à la Parnasse*.

I have the honour to be, Sir, your much indebted and ever grateful servant,

R. B.

P.S. I forgot to mention that, if my plan takes, let me recommend to your humanity and justice the present officer of the second division. He is a very good officer, and is burdened with a family of small children, which, with some debts of early days, crush him much to the ground.[1]

TO THE EARL OF BUCHAN.

DUMFRIES, 12th Jan. 1794.

MY LORD,

Will your Lordship allow me to present you with the inclosed little composition of mine,[2] as a small tribute of gratitude for the acquaintance with which you have been pleased to honour me. Independent of my enthusiasm as a Scotsman, I have rarely met with any thing in history which interests my feelings as a man, equal with the story of Bannockburn. On the one hand, a cruel, but able usurper, leading on the finest army in Europe, to extinguish the last spark of freedom among a greatly-daring and greatly-injured people; on the other hand, the desperate relics of a gallant nation, devoting themselves to rescue their bleeding country, or perish with her.

Liberty! thou art a prize truly, and indeed invaluable! for never canst thou be too dearly bought!

If my little ode has the honour of your lordship's approbation, it will gratify my highest ambition. I have the honour to be, &c.

R. B.

[1] Perhaps in his proposal Burns was actuated quite as much by the desire of *appearing* zealous in his patron Mr. Graham's eyes, as by real zeal for the public good. At any rate we can easily imagine the fiery indignation that would have been roused in his breast had the officer of the second division proposed a plan by which Burns and his "family of small children" were in some danger of suffering.

[2] "Bruce's Address to his Army at Bannockburn.

TO MR. SAMUEL CLARK, JUN.,

DUMFRIES.[1]

Sunday Morning [Jan. 1794].

DEAR SIR,

I was, I know, drunk last night, but I am sober this morning. From the expressions Capt. Dods made use of to me, had I had nobody's welfare to care for but my own, we should certainly have come, according to the manners of the world, to the necessity of murdering one another about the business. The words were such as, generally, I believe, end in a brace of pistols; but I am still pleased to think that I did not ruin the peace and welfare of a wife and a family of children in a drunken squabble. Further, you know that the report of certain political opinions being mine, has already once before brought me to the brink of destruction. I dread lest last night's business may be misrepresented in the same way.—You, I beg, will take care to prevent it. I tax your wish for Mrs. Burns' welfare with the task of waiting, as soon as possible, on every gentleman who was present, and state this to him, and, as you please, show him this letter. What, after all, was the obnoxious toast? "May our success in the present war be equal to the justice of our cause" —a toast that the most outrageous frenzy of loyalty cannot object to. I request and beg that this morning you will wait on the parties present at the foolish dispute. I shall only add, that I am truly sorry that a man who stood so high in my estimation as Mr. Dods, should use me in the manner in which I conceive he has done.

R. B.[2]

[1] This gentleman held the offices of conjunct commissary clerk, and clerk of the peace for the county of Dumfries, and was at this time about twenty-five years of age. He died in 1814.

[2] The above painful epistle refers to one of those acrimonious, and sometimes dangerous political debates into which the poet was hurried by the violence of his own zeal in the cause of liberty, and by his contempt for the "lobster-coated puppies" as he termed those of the military service who seized every opportunity of parading their professional loyalty in his presence.

TO MR. SAMUEL CLARK, JUNIOR,

DUMFRIES.

[DUMFRIES, Jan. 1794.]

MY DEAR SIR,

I recollect something of a drunken promise yesternight to breakfast with you this morning. I am very sorry that it is impossible. I remember, too, you very obligingly mentioned something of your intimacy with Mr. Corbet, our Supervisor-General. Some of our folks about the Excise Office, Edinburgh, had, and perhaps still have, conceived a prejudice against me as being a drunken, dissipated character. I might be all this, you know, and yet be an honest fellow; but you know that I am an honest fellow, and am nothing of this. You may, in your own way, let him know that I am not unworthy of subscribing myself, my dear Clark, your friend,

R. B.

TO MRS. RIDDELL,

WOODLEY PARK.

DUMFRIES, January, 1794.

MADAM,

I dare say that this is the first epistle you ever received from the nether world. I write you from the regions of hell, amid the horrors of the damned. The time and manner of my leaving your earth I do not exactly know, as I took my departure in the heat of a fever of intoxication, contracted at your too hospitable mansion; but, on my arrival here, I was fairly tried, and sentenced to endure the purgatorial tortures of this infernal confine for the space of ninety-nine years, eleven months, and twenty-nine days, and all on account of the impropriety of my conduct yesternight under your roof. Here am I, laid on a bed of pitiless furze, with my aching head reclined on a pillow of ever-piercing thorn, while an infernal tormentor, wrinkled, and old, and cruel, his name I think is *Recollection*, with a whip of scorpions, forbids peace or rest to approach me, and keeps anguish eternally awake. Still, Madam, if I could in any measure be reinstated in the good opinion of the fair circle whom my conduct last night so much injured, I think it would be an alleviation to my tor-

ments. For this reason I trouble you with this letter. To the men of the company I will make no apology.—Your husband, who insisted on my drinking more than I chose, has no right to blame me; and the other gentlemen were partakers of my guilt. But to you, Madam, I have much to apologize. Your good opinion I valued as one of the greatest acquisitions I had made on earth, and I was truly a beast to forfeit it. There was a Miss J——, too, a woman of fine sense, gentle and unassuming manners—do make, on my part, a miserable damned wretch's best apology to her. A Mrs. G——, a charming woman, did me the honour to be prejudiced in my favour; this makes me hope that I have not outraged her beyond all forgiveness.—To all the other ladies please present my humblest contrition for my conduct, and my petition for their gracious pardon. O all ye powers of decency and decorum! whisper to them that my errors, though great, were involuntary—that an intoxicated man is the vilest of beasts—that it was not in my nature to be brutal to any one—that to be rude to a woman, when in my senses, was impossible with me—but—

. . . . . .

Regret! Remorse! Shame! ye three hell-hounds that ever dog my steps and bay at my heels, spare me! spare me!

Forgive the offences, and pity the perdition of, Madam, your humble slave,

R. B.[1]

TO MRS. RIDDELL,

WOODLEY PARK.

DUMFRIES, 1794.

MADAM,

I return your common-place book. I have perused it with much pleasure, and would have continued my criticisms, but as it seems the critic has forfeited your esteem, his strictures must lose their value.

[1] The above letter refers to a drunken frolic, in which Burns was one of several actors, and which took place at Woodley Park. He is said to have been guilty of some rather gross act of indecorum towards his hostess Mrs. Riddell. The lady did not forgive the poet on this petition of his, and they remained estranged for at least about a year. Burns not meeting with ready forgiveness began to consider himself the injured party, and assailed the lady and her husband in verse. See "Monody," vol. iii. p. 170.

If it is true that "offences come only from the heart," before you I am guiltless. To admire, esteem, and prize you, as the most accomplished of women, and the first of friends—if these are crimes, I am the most offending thing alive.

In a face where I used to meet the kind complacency of friendly confidence, *now* to find cold neglect, and contemptuous scorn—is a wrench that my heart can ill bear. It is, however, some kind of miserable good luck, that while *de haut-en-bas* rigour may depress an unoffending wretch to the ground, it has a tendency to rouse a stubborn something in his bosom, which, though it cannot heal the wounds of his soul, is at least an opiate to blunt their poignancy.

With the profoundest respect for your abilities; the most sincere esteem, and ardent regard, for your gentle heart and amiable manners; and the most fervent wish and prayer for your welfare, peace, and bliss, I have the honour to be, Madam, your most devoted humble servant,

R. B.

TO MRS. RIDDELL,

WOODLEY PARK.

[DUMFRIES, 1794.]

I have this moment got the song from Syme, and I am sorry to see that he has spoilt it a good deal. It shall be a lesson to me how I lend him any thing again.

I have sent you "Werter," truly happy to have any, the smallest opportunity of obliging you.

'Tis true, Madam, I saw you once since I was at Woodley Park; and that once froze the very life-blood of my heart. Your reception of me was such, that a wretch meeting the eye of his Judge, about to pronounce sentence of death on him, could only have envied my feelings and situation. But I hate the theme, and never more shall write or speak on it.

One thing I shall proudly say, that I can pay Mrs. R. a higher tribute of esteem, and appreciate her amiable worth more truly, than any man whom I have seen approach her; nor will I yield the *pas* to any man living in subscribing myself with the sincerest truth, her devoted humble servant,

R. B.

TO MR. ALEX. CUNNINGHAM.

DUMFRIES, 25th Feb. 1794.

Canst thou minister to a mind diseased? Canst thou speak peace and rest to a soul tossed on a sea of troubles, without one friendly star to guide her course, and dreading that the next surge may overwhelm her? Canst thou give to a frame, trembling under the tortures of suspense, the stability and hardihood of the rock that braves the blast? If thou canst not do the least of these why wouldst thou disturb me in my miseries, with thy inquiries after me? . . .

For these two months I have not been able to lift a pen. My constitution and frame were, *ab origine*, blasted with a deep incurable taint of hypochondria, which poisons my existence. Of late a number of domestic vexations, and some pecuniary share in the ruin of these d—d times; losses which, though trifling, were yet what I could ill bear, have so irritated me, that my feelings at times could only be envied by a reprobate spirit, listening to the sentence that dooms it to perdition.

Are you deep in the language of consolation? I have exhausted in reflection every topic of comfort. *A heart at ease* would have been charmed with my sentiments and reasonings; but as to myself, I was like Judas Iscariot preaching the gospel; he might melt and mould the hearts of those around him, but his own kept its native incorrigibility.

Still there are two great pillars that bear us up, amid the wreck of misfortune and misery. The ONE is composed of the different modifications of a certain noble, stubborn something in man, known by the names of courage, fortitude, magnanimity. The OTHER is made up of those feelings and sentiments, which, however the sceptic may deny them, or the enthusiast may disfigure them, are yet, I am convinced, original and component parts of the human soul; those *senses of the mind*, if I may be allowed the expression, which connect us with, and link us to, those awful obscure realities—an all-powerful, and equally beneficent God; and a world to come, beyond death and the grave. The first gives the nerve of combat, while a ray of hope beams on the field; the last pours the balm of comfort into the wounds which time can never cure.

I do not remember, my dear Cunningham, that you and I ever talked on the subject of religion at all. I know some who laugh at it, as the trick of the crafty FEW, to lead the undiscerning MANY; or at most as an uncertain obscurity, which mankind can never know anything of, and with which they are fools if they give themselves much to do. Nor would I quarrel with a man for his irreligion, any more than I would for his want of a musical ear. I would regret that he was shut out from what, to me and to others, were such superlative sources of enjoyment. It is in this point of view, and for this reason, that I will deeply imbue the mind of every child of mine with religion. If my son should happen to be a man of feeling, sentiment, and taste, I shall thus add largely to his enjoyments. Let me flatter myself that this sweet little fellow, who is just now running about my desk, will be a man of a melting, ardent, glowing heart; and an imagination, delighted with the painter, and rapt with the poet. Let me figure him wandering out in a sweet evening, to inhale the balmy gales, and enjoy the growing luxuriance of the spring; himself the while in the blooming youth of life. He looks abroad on all Nature, and through Nature up to Nature's God. His soul, by swift delighting degrees, is wrapt above this sublunary sphere until he can be silent no longer, and bursts out into the glorious enthusiasm of Thomson—

> These, as they change, Almighty Father, these
> Are but the varied God.—The rolling year
> Is full of thee:

and so on, in all the spirit and ardour of that charming hymn.

These are no ideal pleasures, they are real delights; and I ask, what of the delights among the sons of men are superior, not to say equal to them? And they have this precious, vast addition, that conscious Virtue stamps them for her own; and lays hold on them to bring herself into the presence of a witnessing, judging, and approving God.[1]

R. B.

[1] "They who have been told that Burns was ever a degraded being—who have permitted themselves to believe that his only consolations were those of 'the opiate guilt applies to grief,' will do well to pause over this noble letter and judge for themselves."—LOCKHART.

TO MR. PETER HILL, BOOKSELLER, EDINBURGH.

DUMFRIES, Feb. 1794.

MY DEAR SIR,

I am half angry with you that you are not at any pains to keep squares with our Library here. They complain much of your not attending properly to their orders; and, but for the exertions of Mr. Lewars, a young man whom I once introduced to you, they had applied elsewhere. Apropos, the first volume of Dalrymple's Memoirs, Mr. Lewars had the ill-luck to get spoiled in his possession, which unless he can replace, will bring him in for the whole book. It was published, I think, in separate volumes, so that with a little industry you may possibly be able to supply him. Mr. Wallace,[1] the gentleman who will deliver this, can inform you of the edition, &c.

Now that business is over, how are you? and how do you weather this accursed time? God only knows what will be the consequence, but in the meantime, the country—at least our part of it—is still progressive to the devil. For my part I "jouk and let the jaw flee o'er."[2] As my hopes in this world are but slender, I am turning rapidly devotee, in the prospect of sharing largely in the world to come.

How is old, sinful Smellie coming on with this world?—for as to the other, I suppose he has given that up. Is there any talk of his second volume? If you meet with my much valued old friend Colonel Dunbar, of the Crochallan Fencibles, remember me most affectionately to him. Alas! not unfrequently, when my heart is in a wandering humour, I live past scenes over again: to my mind's eye, you, Dunbar, Cleghorn, Cunningham, &c. present their friendly phizes, and my bosom aches with tender recollections.—Adieu,

R. B.

[1] A young Dumfries "writer" who afterwards displayed much zeal in behalf of the bereaved family of the poet.

[2] A proverbial expression—"I duck and let the wave pass over me."

TO MR. JAMES JOHNSON.

DUMFRIES, [Feb.] 1794.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I send you by my friend Mr. Wallace, forty-one songs for your 5th volume. Mr. Clarke has also a good many, if he have not, with his usual indolence, *cast them at the cocks.* I have still a good parcel amongst my hands in scraps and fragments; so that I hope we will make shift with our last volume.

You should have heard from me long ago; but over and above some vexatious share in the pecuniary losses of these accursed times, I have all this winter been plagued with low spirits and blue devils, so that *I have almost hung my harp on the willow trees.*

I have got an old Highland durk [dirk], for which I have great veneration; as it once was the durk of *Lord Balmerino.* It fell into bad hands, who stripped it of the silver mounting, as well as the knife and fork. I have some thoughts of sending it to your care, to get it mounted anew. Our friend Clarke owes me an account, somewhere about a pound, which would go a very good way in paying the expense. I remember you once settled an account in this way before; and as you still have money matters to settle with him, you might accommodate us both.—I do not, my dear Sir, wish you to do this, and I beg you will not hint it to Mr. Clarke; if we do it at all, I will break it to him myself. My best compliments to your worthy old father and your better half.—Yours,

R. B.

TO ALEXANDER FINDLATER, SUPERVISOR OF EXCISE, DUMFRIES.[3]

DUMFRIES, [Feb.] 1794.

SIR,

Inclosed are the two schemes.[4] I would not

[3] The Correspondence comprises only the present and other two previous unimportant letters to this gentleman, Burns's immediate superior in the excise. He was long resident in Glasgow, where he died in December, 1839, at the age of eighty-five. In the appendix to Lockhart's *Life of Burns* (vol. i. p. 160) will be found a statement by Findlater, bearing on the poet's manner of life while in the excise.

[4] It is not known what schemes are here referred to—probably they were tabulated statements of figures relating to the excise returns.

have troubled you with the Collector's one, but for suspicion lest it be not right. Mr. Erskine[1] promised me to make it right, if you will have the goodness to show him how. As I have no copy of the scheme for myself, and the alterations being very considerable from what it was formerly, I hope that I shall have access to this scheme I send you when I come to face up my new books. *So much for schemes.*—And that no scheme to betray a FRIEND, or mislead a STRANGER; to seduce a young GIRL, or rob a HEN-ROOST; to subvert LIBERTY, or bribe an EXCISEMAN; to disturb the GENERAL ASSEMBLY, or annoy a GOSSIPPING; to overthrow the credit of ORTHODOXY, or the authority of OLD SONGS; to oppose *your wishes*, or frustrate *my hopes*—MAY PROSPER—is the sincere wish and prayer of

R. B.

TO MR. ALEX. CUNNINGHAM.

3d March, 1794.

Since I wrote to you the last lugubrious sheet, I have not had time to write you further. When I say that I had not time, that, as usual, means, that the three demons, Indolence, Business, and Ennui, have so completely shared my hours among them, as not to leave me a five minutes' fragment to take up a pen in.

Thank heaven, I feel my spirits buoying upwards with the renovating year. Now I shall in good earnest take up Thomson's songs. I dare say he thinks I have used him unkindly, and I must own with too much appearance of truth; though if offences come only from the heart, I assure him that I am innocent. Apropos, do you know the much admired old Highland air called "the Sutor's Dochter?" It is a first-rate favourite of mine, and I have written what I reckon one of my best songs to it. I will send it you, set as I think it should be, and as it was sung with great applause in many fashionable groups by Major Robertson, of Lude, who was here with his corps. By the way, if you do not know him, let me beg of you, as you would relish a high acquisition to your social happiness, to get acquainted with him. He always, every time I had the very great pleasure of being in his company, reminded me of a forcible saying of Charlie Caldwell, a drunken carrier in Ayr:—Charles had a *care sposa* after his own heart, who used to take camp out with him, till neither could see the other; then these honest genii of old Scottish social life, "reaming swats," used to transport the tender pair beyond the bounds of sober joy, to the reign of rapture!—the ardent lover would grapple the yielding fair to his bosom:—"Marget, ye're a glory to God, and the delight o' my soul!"

As I cannot in conscience tax you with the postage of a packet, I must keep this bizarre melange of an epistle until I find the chance of a private conveyance. Here follows the song I have mentioned.

SONG.

TUNE—*The Sutor's Dochter.*

Wilt thou be my dearie?
When sorrow wrings thy gentle heart, &c.

[See vol. iii. p. 166.

There is one commission that I must trouble you with. I lately lost a valuable seal, a present from a departed friend, which vexes me much. I have gotten one of your Highland pebbles, which I fancy would make me a very decent one; and I want to cut my armorial bearings on it; will you be so obliging as inquire what will be the expense of such a business?[2] I do not know that my name is matriculated, as the heralds call it, at all; but I have invented arms for myself; so you know I shall be the chief of the name; and, by courtesy of Scotland, will likewise be entitled to supporters. These, however, I do not intend having on my seal. I am a bit of a herald, and shall give you, *secundum artem*, my arms. On a field, azure, a holly bush, seeded, proper, in base; a shepherd's pipe and crook, saltierwise, also proper, in chief. On a wreath of the colours, a wood-lark perching on a sprig of bay-tree, proper, for crest. Two mottoes: round the top of the crest, *Wood-notes wild*; at the bottom of the shield, in the usual place, *Better a wee bush than nae bield*. By the shepherd's pipe and crook I do not mean the nonsense of painters of Arcadia, but a *Stock*

[1] A brother exciseman of Burns at this time.

[2] The seal, with the arms as devised by the poet, was cut in Edinburgh, and used by him till his death.

and Horn,[1] and a *Club*, such as you see at the head of Allan Ramsay, in Allan's quarto edition of the "Gentle Shepherd." By the bye, do you know Allan? He must be a man of very great genius[2]—Why is he not more known?—Has he no patrons? or do "Poverty's cold wind and crushing rain beat keen and heavy" on him? I once, and but once, got a glance of that noble edition of the noblest pastoral in the world: and dear as it was, I mean, dear as to my pocket, I would have bought it; but I was told that it was printed and engraved for subscribers only. He is the *only* artist who has hit *genuine* pastoral *costume*. What, my dear Cunningham, is there in riches, that they narrow and encallous the heart so? I think, that were I as rich as the sun, I would be as generous as day; but as I have no reason to imagine my soul a nobler one than any other man's, I must conclude that wealth imparts a bird-lime quality to the possessor, at which the man, in his native poverty, would have revolted. What has led me to this, is the idea of so much merit as Mr. Allan possesses, and such riches as a nabob or government contractor possesses, and why they do not form a mutual league. Let Wealth shelter and cherish unprotected Merit, and the gratitude and celebrity of that merit will richly repay the outlay.

March 22.

In fact, I am writing you a journal, and not a letter. A bustle of business has laid my epistolary pen aside in silence, since I took it up last to you.

I have just received a letter from Thomson which has filled me with self-reproaches. I will directly, and in good earnest, set about his work. I am sorry I did not know him when I was in Edinburgh; but I will tell you a plot which I have been contriving: you and he shall join in the course of this summer, meet me Half-way; that is, at the "Bield Inn,"[3] and there we will pour out a Drink Offering before the Lord and enter into a Solemn League and Covenant, never to be broken nor forgotten.

Wha first shall rise to gang awa
A cuckold, coward loon is he:
Wha first beside his chair shall fa'
He is the King amang us THREE.

R. B.

TO MISS ——.[4]

DUMFRIES, [May,] 1794.

MADAM,

Nothing short of a kind of absolute necessity could have made me trouble you with this letter. Except my ardent and just esteem for your sense, taste, and worth, every sentiment arising in my breast, as I put pen to paper to you, is painful. The scenes I have passed with the friend of my soul and his amiable connections! the wrench at my heart to think that he is gone, for ever gone from me, never more to meet in the wanderings of a weary world! and the cutting reflection of all, that I had most unfortunately, though most undeservedly, lost the confidence of that soul of worth, ere it took its flight![5]

These, Madam, are sensations of no ordinary anguish.—However, you also may be offended with some *imputed* improprieties of mine; sensibility you know I possess, and sincerity none will deny me.

To oppose these prejudices which have been raised against me, is not the business of this letter. Indeed it is a warfare I know not how to wage. The powers of positive Vice I can in some degree calculate, and against direct Malevolence I can be on my guard: but who can estimate the fatuity of giddy Caprice, or

[1] This rude musical instrument is minutely described by the poet himself in a letter to George Thomson of 19th–20th November, 1794. See Thomson Correspondence.

[2] David Allan was a painter that had a considerable reputation in his day, his forte being homely Scottish subjects such as those in which Sir David Wilkie afterwards excelled. He was born in 1744 and died in 1796, soon after Burns, leaving a series of drawings illustrative of the poet's works.

[3] The "Bield Inn" is on the high-road half-way between Edinburgh and Dumfries, near Tweedsmuir in Peebles-shire.—The proposed meeting never took place.

[4] A sister of Mrs. Robert Riddell, but whose name we have been unable to discover.

[5] This refers to the death of Capt. R. Riddell of Glenriddell, which took place on the 21st April, 1794. In the quarrel that had taken place between Burns and Mr. and Mrs. Walter Riddell Capt. Riddell had sided with his own relations against the poet. See "Sonnet on the Death of Robert Riddell," vol. iii. p. 174.

ward off the unthinking mischief of precipitate Folly?

I have a favour to request of you, Madam; and of your sister Mrs. Robt. Riddell, through your means. You know that, at the wish of my late friend, I made a collection of all my trifles in verse which I had ever written. They are many of them local, some of them puerile and silly, and all of them unfit for the public eye. As I have some little fame at stake, a fame that I trust may live when the hate of those who "watch for my halting," and the contumelious sneer of those whom accident has made my superiors, will with themselves be gone to the regions of oblivion; I am uneasy now for the fate of those manuscripts.—Will Mrs. Riddell have the goodness to destroy them, or return them to me? As a pledge of friendship they were bestowed; and that circumstance indeed was all their merit. Most unhappily for me, that merit they no longer possess; and I hope that Mrs. Riddell's goodness, which I well know, and ever will revere, will not refuse this favour to a man whom she once held in some degree of estimation.[1]

With the sincerest esteem, I have the honour to be, Madam, &c.

R. B.

TO DAVID M'CULLOCH, ESQ.,[2]

ARDWELL, GATEHOUSE.

DUMFRIES, 21st June, 1794.

MY DEAR SIR,

My long projected journey through your country is at last fixed; and on Wednesday next, if you have nothing of more importance than take a saunter down to Gatehouse, about two or three o'clock, I shall be happy to take a draught of M'Kune's best with you. Collector Syme will be at Glen's about that time, and will meet us about dish-of-tea hour. Syme goes also to Kerroughtree,[3] and let me remind you of your kind promise to accompany me there. I will need all the friends I can muster, for I am indeed ill at ease whenever I approach your Honourables and Right Honourables. Yours sincerely,

R. B.

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

CASTLE DOUGLAS, 25th June, 1794.

Here in a solitary inn, in a solitary village, am I set by myself, to amuse my brooding fancy as I may.—Solitary confinement, you know, is Howard's favourite idea of reclaiming sinners; so let me consider by what fatality it happens that I have so long been exceeding sinful as to neglect the correspondence of the most valued friend I have on earth. To tell you that I have been in poor health will not be excuse enough, though it is true. I am afraid that I am about to suffer for the follies of my youth. My medical friends threaten me with a flying gout; but I trust they are mistaken.

I am just going to trouble your critical patience with the first sketch of a stanza I have been framing as I passed along the road. The subject is Liberty: you know, my honoured friend, how dear the theme is to me. I design it as an irregular ode for General Washington's birth-day. After having mentioned the degeneracy of other kingdoms, I come to Scotland thus:

Thee, Caledonia, thy wild heaths among,
Thee, famed for martial deed and sacred song,
To thee I turn with swimming eyes;
Where is that soul of freedom fled?
Immingled with the mighty dead!
Beneath the hallowed turf where Wallace lies,
Hear it not, Wallace, in thy bed of death,
Ye babbling winds in silence sweep,
Disturb ye not the hero's sleep.

With the additions of

That arm which nerved with thundering fate,
Braved usurpation's boldest daring!
One quenched in darkness like the sinking star,
And one the palsied arm of tottering, powerless age.[4]

You will probably have another scrawl from me in a stage or two.

R. B.

[1] This MS. volume was duly returned, as above requested. It was placed in Dr. Currie's hands, shortly after the poet's death, and ultimately found its way to the Athenæum Library, Liverpool.

[2] The young gentleman who communicated to Lockhart the affecting anecdote of Burns on the occasion of a county ball in Dumfries, as given in the *Life*. See vol. i. p. 103.

[3] An estate owned by Mr. Heron of Heron. See letter to this gentleman, dated March, 1795.

[4] See "Ode for General Washington's Birthday," and note, vol. iii. p. 179.

TO MR. JAMES JOHNSON,

ENGRAVER, EDINBURGH

June 20th, 1794.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I thank you for your kind present of poor Riddell's Book.[1] Depend upon it that your fifth volume shall not be forgotten. In the meantime, I have got you two new subscribers, Patrick Heron, Esq. of Kerroughtree, and Major Heron of Kerroughtree. Please put up two sets of your four volumes, and direct them as above, and leave them at Mr. Heron's, George Square. Please do it on receipt of this, as there will be a carrier from Kerroughtree in Edinburgh this week.

I have just been getting three or four songs for your book. Pray, will you let me know how many, and what are the songs Urbani has borrowed from your *Museum?* Yours,

R. B.

TO CAPTAIN JOHN HAMILTON,

DUMFRIES.[2]

[July, 1794.]

SIR,

It is even so—you are the only person in Dumfries or in the world, to whom I have *run in debt;* and I took the freedom with you, because I believed, and do still believe, that I might do it with more impunity as to my feelings than any other person almost that I ever met with. I will settle with you soon; and I assure you, Sir, it is with infinite pain that I have transgressed on your goodness. The unlucky fact for me is, that in the beginning of these disastrous times, in a moment of imprudence, I lent my name to a friend, who has since been unfortunate; and of course, I had a sum to pay which my very limited income and large family could ill afford. God forbid, Sir, that any thing should ever distress you as much as writing this card has done me.

With sincerest gratitude and most respectful esteem, I have the honour to be, Sir, your very humble servant,

R. B.

[1] A posthumous work entitled *A Collection of Scots, Galwegian, and Border Tunes*, by Robert Riddell of Glenriddell.

[2] The poet's landlord, who seems about this time to have written him a note requesting the payment of arrears of rent. See two subsequent letters to this gentleman.

TO MR. PETER HILL, BOOKSELLER,

EDINBURGH.

[DUMFRIES, Oct. 1794.]

MY DEAR HILL,

By a carrier of yesterday, Henry Osborn by name, I sent you a Kippered Salmon, which I trust you will duly receive, and which I also trust will give you many a toothful of satisfaction. If you have the confidence to say that there is anything of the kind in all your great city superior to this in true kipper relish and flavour, I will be revenged by—not sending you another next season. In return, the first party of friends that dine with you (provided that your fellow travellers, and my trusted and well beloved veterans in intimacy, Messrs. Ramsay and Cameron,[3] be of the party), about that time in the afternoon when a relish or devil, becomes grateful, give them two or three slices of the kipper, and drink a bumper to your friends in Dumfries. Moreover, by last Saturday's Fly, I sent you a hare, which I hope came, and carriage free, safe to your hospitable mansion and social table. So much for business.

How do you like the following pastoral which I wrote the other day, for a tune that I dare say you well know?

CA' THE YOWES TO THE KNOWES.

See vol. iii. p. 183.

And how do you like the following?

ON SEEING MRS. KEMBLE IN YARICO.

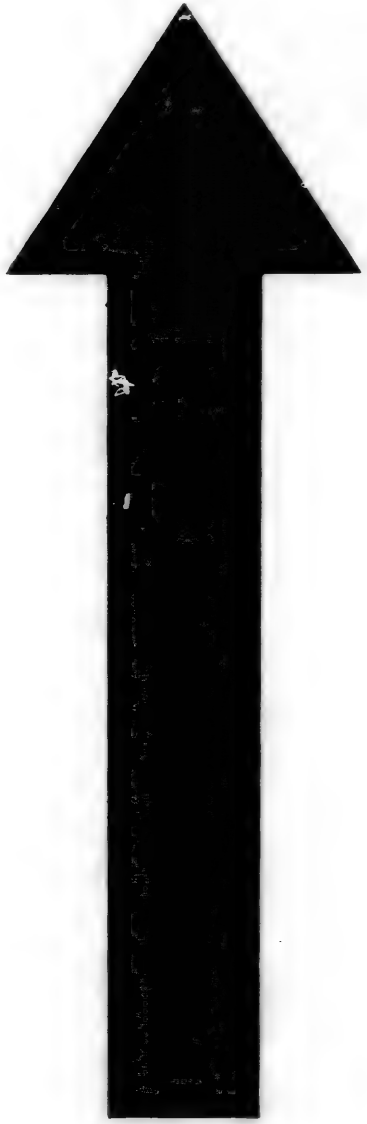
Kemble, thou cur'st my unbelief
Of Moses and his rod;
At Yarico's sweet notes of grief,
The rock with tears had flow'd.

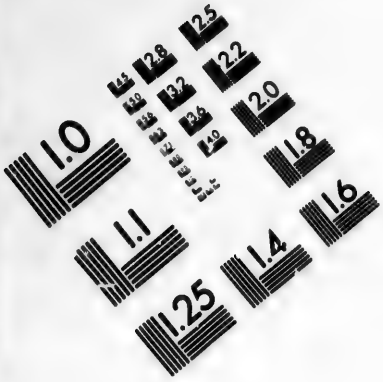
Or this?

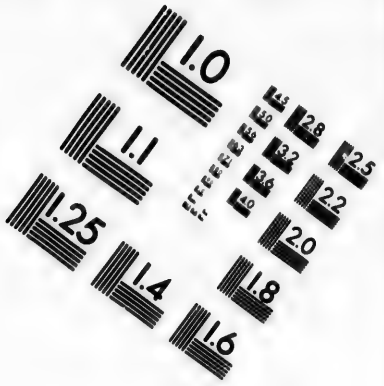
ON W—— R—— ESQUIRE.

So vile was poor Wat—such a miscreant slave,
That the worms even damn'd him when laid in his grave;

[3] Mr. Ramsay was the printer of the *Edinburgh Evening Courant*, and Mr. Cameron was a paper manufacturer and wholesale stationer. Both gentlemen, accompanied by Mr. Hill, had recently paid a visit to the poet.







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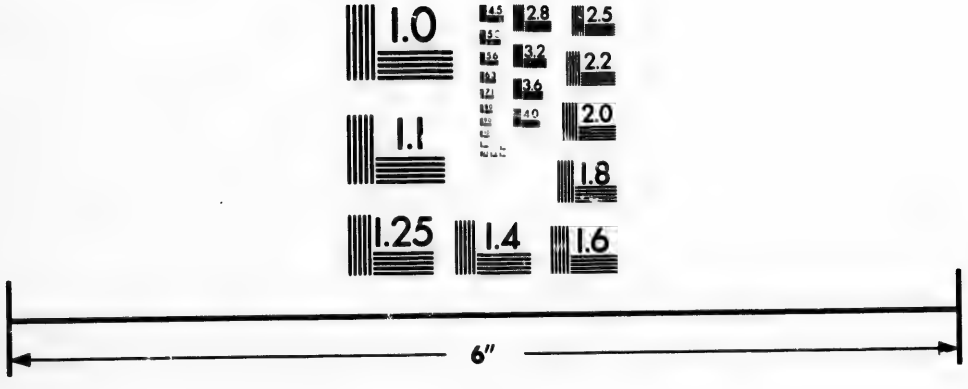

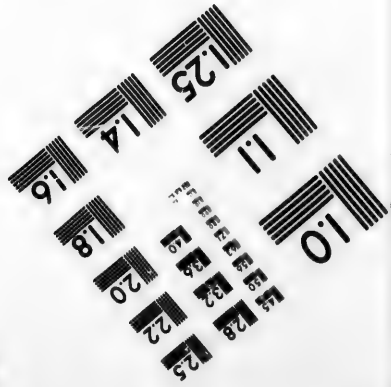

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"In the skull there is famine!" a starv'd reptile cries;
"And his heart it is poison," another replies.[1]

My best good wishes to Mrs. Hill, and believe me to be, ever yours,

R. B.

TO PATRICK MILLER, JUN., ESQ.,[2]

OF DALSWINTON.

DUMFRIES, Nov. 1794.

MY DEAR SIR,

Your offer is indeed truly generous, and most sincerely do I thank you for it: but in my present situation, I find that I dare not accept it. You well know my political sentiments; and were I an insular individual, unconnected with a wife and a family of children, with the most fervid enthusiasm I would have volunteered my services: I then could and would have despised all consequences that might have ensued.

My prospect in the Excise is something; at least, it is, encumbered as I am with the welfare, the very existence, of near half-a-score of helpless individuals, what I dare not sport with.

In the mean time, they are most welcome to my Ode;[3] only, let them insert it as a thing they have met with by accident and unknown to me.—Nay, if Mr. Perry, whose honour, after your character of him, I cannot doubt, if he will give me an address and channel by which any thing will come safe from those spies with which he may be certain that his correspondence is beset, I will now and then send him any bagatelle that I may write. In the present hurry of Europe, nothing but news and politics will be regarded; but against the days of peace, which Heaven send soon, my little assistance may perhaps fill up an idle column of a newspaper. I have long had it in my head to try my hand in the way of little prose essays, which I propose sending into the world through the medium of some newspaper; and should these be worth his while, to these Mr. Perry shall be welcome; and all my reward shall be, his treating me with his paper, which, by the bye, to any body who has the least relish for wit, is a high treat indeed.

With the most grateful esteem, I am ever, dear Sir,

R. B.

[1] A somewhat different version of this will be found at p. 173, vol. iii.

[2] "In a conversation with his friend Mr. Perry (the proprietor of *The Morning Chronicle*), Mr. Miller represented to that gentleman the insufficiency of Burns's salary to answer the imperious demands of a numerous family. In their sympathy for his misfortunes, and in their regret that his talents were nearly lost to the world of letters, these gentlemen agreed on the plan of settling him in London. To accomplish this most desirable object, Mr. Perry, very spiritedly, made the poet a handsome offer of an annual stipend for the exercise of his talents in his newspaper. Burns's reasons for refusing this offer are stated in the present letter."—CROMEK.

Mr. Perry was a native of Aberdeen, and long distinguished in London as an able and spirited journalist on the Whig side of politics. By his liberality in employing a number of qualified persons to relieve each other, he was the first to establish the present improved system of reporting for newspapers. In his hands *The Morning Chronicle* rose to high distinction as an uncompromising advocate of liberal principles in very troublous times. He died in Dec. 1821, aged 65.

[3] This is in all probability the "Ode for General Washington's Birthday."

TO MRS. DUNLOP, IN LONDON.

DUMFRIES, 20th December, 1794.

I have been prodigiously disappointed in this London journey of yours. In the first place, when your last to me reached Dumfries, I was in the country, and did not return until too late to answer your letter; in the next place, I thought you would certainly take this route; and now I know not what has become of you, or whether this may reach you at all.—God grant that it may find you and yours in prospering health and good spirits! Do let me hear from you the soonest possible.

As I hope to get a frank from my friend Captain Miller, I shall, every leisure hour, take up the pen, and gossip away whatever comes first, prose or poetry, sermon or song. In this last article I have abounded of late. I have often mentioned to you a superb publication of Scottish songs, which is making its appearance in your great metropolis, and where I have the honour to preside over the Scottish verse, as no less a personage than Peter Pindar does over the English.

December 29th.

Since I began this letter, I have been appointed to act in the capacity of supervisor here, and I assure you, what with the load of business, and what with that business being new to me, I could scarcely have commanded ten minutes to have spoken to you, had you been in town, much less to have written you an epistle. This appointment is only temporary, and during the illness of the present incumbent; but I look forward to an early period when I shall be appointed in full form: a consummation devoutly to be wished! My political sins seem to be forgiven me.[1]

January 1st, 1795.

This is the season (New-year's-day is now my date) of wishing; and mine are most fervently offered up for you! May life to you be a positive blessing while it lasts, for your own sake; and that it may yet be greatly prolonged, is my wish for my own sake, and for the sake of the rest of your friends! What a transient business is life! Very lately I was a boy; but t'other day I was a young man; and I already begin to feel the rigid fibre and stiffening joints of old age coming fast o'er my frame. With all my follies of youth, and, I fear, a few vices of manhood, still I congratulate myself on having had in early days religion strongly impressed on my mind. I have nothing to say to any one as to which sect he belongs to, or what creed he believes; but I look on the man, who is firmly persuaded of infinite Wisdom and Goodness, superintending and directing every circumstance that can happen in his lot—I felicitate such a man as having a solid foundation for his mental enjoyment; a firm prop and sure stay, in the hour of difficulty, trouble, and distress; and a never-failing anchor of hope, when he looks beyond the grave.

January 12th.

You will have seen our worthy and ingenious friend, the Doctor, long ere this. I hope he is well, and beg to be remembered to him. I have just been reading over again, I dare say for the hundred and fiftieth time, his *View of Society and Manners;* and still I read it with delight. His humour is perfectly original—it is neither the humour of Addison, nor Swift, nor Sterne, nor of any body but Dr. Moore. By the bye, you have deprived me of *Zeluco*, remember that, when you are disposed to rake up the sins of my neglect from among the ashes of my laziness.

He has paid me a pretty compliment, by quoting me in his last publication.[2]

R. B.

[1] On the 15th January, 1795, Burns writes to Thomson:—"The foregoing has lain by me this fortnight, for want of a spare moment. The Supervisor of Excise here being ill, I have been acting for him," &c. We can have no doubt that this is the temporary appointment referred to in the above paragraph.

TO CAPTAIN JOHN HAMILTON.

DUMFRIES, Jan. 1795.

I enclose you three guineas, and shall soon settle all with you. I shall not mention your goodness to me; it is beyond my power to describe either the feelings of my wounded soul at not being able to pay you as I ought, or the grateful respect with which I have the honour to be, Sir, your deeply obliged humble servant,

R. B.[3]

[2] *Edward*, a novel, by Dr. Moore.

[3] To the above note Captain Hamilton wrote the following friendly reply:—

"DUMFRIES, 30th Jan. 1795.

"DEAR SIR,

"At same time that I acknowledge the receipt of three guineas to account of house rent, will you permit me to enter a complaint of a different nature? When you first came here I courted your acquaintance; I wished to see you; I asked you to call in and take a family-dinner now and then, when it suited your convenience.

"For more than twelve months you have never entered my door, but seemed rather shy when we met. This kept me from sending you any further particular invitation.

"If I have in any shape offended, or from inadvertency hurt the delicacy of your feelings, tell me so, and I will endeavour to set it to rights.

"If you are disposed to renew our acquaintance I will be glad to see you to a family-dinner at three o'clock on Sunday, and, at any rate, hope you will believe me, dear Sir, your sincere friend,

"JOHN HAMILTON."

TO CAPTAIN JOHN HAMILTON.

Saturday Morn, [14th Feb. 1795].[1]

SIR,

I was from home, and had not the opportunity of seeing your more than polite, your most friendly card. It is not possible, most worthy Sir, that you could do anything to offend any body. My backwardness proceeds alone from the abashing consciousness of my obscure station in the ranks of life. Many an evening have I sighed to call in and spend it at your social fireside; but a shyness of appearing obtrusive amid the fashionable visitants occasionally there, kept me at a distance. It shall do so no more. On Monday I must be in the country, and most part of the week; but the first leisure evening I shall avail myself of your hospitable goodness. With the most ardent sentiments of gratitude and respect, I have the honour to be, Sir, your highly obliged, humble servant,

R. B.

TO MRS. WALTER RIDDELL.

DUMFRIES, [March,] 1795.

Mr. Burns' compliments to Mrs. Riddell—is much obliged to her for her polite attention in sending him the book. Owing to Mr. B. being at present acting as supervisor of excise, a department that occupies his every hour of the day, he has not that time to spare which is necessary for any *belle-lettre* pursuit; but, as he will, in a week or two, again return to his wonted leisure, he will then pay that attention to Mrs. R.'s beautiful song, "To thee, loved Nith," which it so well deserves.[2]

When *Anacharsis' Travels* come to hand, which Mrs. Riddell mentioned as her gift to the public library, Mr. B. will feel honoured by the indulgence of a perusal of them before presentation: it is a book he has never yet seen, and the regulations of the library allow too little leisure for deliberate reading.

Friday Evening.

P.S. Mr. Burns will be much obliged to Mrs. Riddell if she will favour him with a perusal of any of her poetical pieces which he may not have seen.

TO MR HERON, OF HERON.[3]

DUMFRIES, [March,] 1795.

SIR,

I enclose you some copies of a couple of political ballads; one of which, I believe, you have never seen.[4] Would to Heaven I could make you master of as many votes in the Stewartry—but—

[1] Robert Chambers gives 31st Jan. as a conjectural date, but the first sentence of the letter itself hardly justifies that date. Burns at this time was acting temporarily as supervisor, and was very busy and much away from home. We know from a letter addressed to Thomson that on February 7th he was snow-stayed at Ecclefechan. By the following Saturday he would have returned home, where probably a fresh communication awaited him from Captain Hamilton repeating the former invitation but for a Monday evening, and to both communications Burns replied as above. Chambers shrewdly hints that the reasons given by the poet for not frequently calling on the worthy Captain were not the real ones—which were probably Burns's standing on the footing of a debtor to his host, the Riddell quarrel, the growing suspicion with which some of the respectable society of the place were beginning to regard him, and his own many imprudences.

[2] This song has fortunately been preserved, and as it possesses considerable merit we give it here:—

TO THEE, LOVED NITH.

To thee, loved Nith, thy gladsome plains,
Where late with careless thought I ranged,
Though pressed with care, and sunk in wo,
To thee I bring a heart unchanged.
I love thee, Nith, thy banks and braes,
Though Memory there my bosom tear,
For there he roved that broke my heart,
Yet to that heart, ah, still how dear!

And now your banks and bonnie braes
But waken sad remembrance' smart:
The very shades I held most dear
Now strike fresh anguish to my heart:
Deserted bower! where are they now?
Ah! where the garlands that I wove
With faithful care—each morn to deck
The altars of ungrateful love!

The flowers of spring, how gay they bloomed
When last with him I wandered here!
The flowers of spring are past away
For wintry horrors dark and drear.
Yon osier'd stream by whose lone banks
My songs have lulled him oft to rest,
Is now in icy fetters locked—
Cold as my false love's frozen breast.

Mrs. Riddell's communication seems to have been sent for the purpose of paving the way to a reconciliation between her and the poet.

[3] Also styled "of Kerroughtree," but properly as above.

[4] See the "Heron Ballads," vol. iii. pp. 210, 211.

Who does the utmost that he can,
Does well, acts nobly—angels could no more.

In order to bring my humble efforts to bear with more effect on the foe, I have privately printed a good many copies of both ballads, and have sent them among friends all about the country. To pillory on Parnassus the rank reprobation of character, the utter dereliction of all principle, in a profligate junto which has not only outraged virtue, but violated common decency; which, spurning even hypocrisy as paltry iniquity below their daring—to unmask their flagitiousness to the broadest day—to deliver such over to their merited fate, is surely not merely innocent, but laudable; is not only propriety, but virtue. You have already as your auxiliary, the sober detestation of mankind on the heads of your opponents; and I swear by the lyre of Thalia to muster on your side all the votaries of honest Laughter, and fair, candid Ridicule!

I am extremely obliged to you for your kind mention of my interests in a letter which Mr. Syme showed me. At present my situation in life must be in a great measure stationary, at least for two or three years. The statement is this—I am on the supervisors' list, and as we come on there by precedency, in two or three years I shall be at the head of that list, and be appointed *of course*. *Then*, a FRIEND might be of service to me in getting me into a place of the kingdom which I would like. A supervisor's income varies from about a hundred and twenty to two hundred a year; but the business is an incessant drudgery, and would be nearly a complete bar to every species of literary pursuit. The moment I am appointed supervisor, in the common routine, I may be nominated on the collector's list; and this is always a business purely of political patronage. A collectorship varies much, from better than two hundred a year to near a thousand. They also come forward by precedency on the list; and have, besides a handsome income, a life of complete leisure. A life of literary leisure, with a decent competency, is the summit of my wishes. It would be the prudish affectation of silly pride in me to say that I do not need, or would not be indebted to a political friend; at the same time, Sir, I by no means lay my affairs before you thus, to hook my dependent situation on your benevolence. If, in my progress of life, an opening should occur where the good offices of a gentleman of your public character and political consequence might bring me forward, I shall petition your goodness with the same frankness as I now do myself the honour to subscribe myself, &c.,

R. B.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE *MORNING CHRONICLE*.[1]

DUMFRIES, 1795.

SIR,

You will see by your subscribers' list, that I have now been about nine months one of that number.

I am sorry to inform you, that in that time, seven or eight of your papers either have never been sent me, or else have never reached me. To be deprived of any one number of the first newspaper in Great Britain for information, ability, and independence, is what I can ill brook and bear; but to be deprived of that most admirable oration of the Marquis of Lansdowne, when he made the great, though ineffectual attempt, (in the language of the poet, I fear too true,) "to save a SINKING

[1] Mr. Perry. See note in page 240. "This letter owes its origin to the following circumstance. A neighbour of the poet's at Dumfries, called on him, and complained that he had been greatly disappointed in the irregular delivery of the paper of the *Morning Chronicle*. Burns asked 'Why do you not write to the editors of the paper?' 'Good God, Sir, can *I* presume to write to the learned editors of a newspaper?'—'Well, if *you* are afraid of writing to the Editors of a Newspaper, *I* am not; and if you think proper, I'll draw up a sketch of a letter which you may copy.' Burns tore a leaf from his excise book, and instantly produced the sketch which I have transcribed, and which is here printed. The poor man thanked him, and took the letter home. However, that caution which the watchfulness of his enemies had taught him to exercise, prompted him to the prudence of begging a friend to wait on the person for whom it was written, and request the favour to have it returned. This request was complied with, and the paper never appeared in print." —CROMEK.

We think Cromek has misunderstood the spirit in which the above stilted epistle was written. It seems highly probable that Burns wrote it in one of his sportive moods; but that on sober second thought, he came to the conclusion that the joke was not a brilliant one, or might be liable to misconstruction, and that he therefore asked the letter to be returned.

STATE"—this was a loss that I neither can nor will forgive you.[1]—That paper, Sir, never reached me; but I demand it of you. I am a BRITON; and must be interested in the cause of LIBERTY: I am a MAN; and the RIGHTS OF HUMAN NATURE cannot be indifferent to me. However, do not let me mislead you: I am not a man in that situation of life, which, as your subscriber, can be of any consequence to you, in the eyes of those to whom SITUATION OF LIFE ALONE is the criterion of MAN.—I am but a plain tradesman, in this distant, obscure, country town: but that humble domicile in which I shelter my wife and children, is the CASTELLUM of a BRITON; and that scanty, hard-earned income which supports them, is as truly my property, as the most magnificent fortune, of the most PUISSANT MEMBER of your HOUSE OF NOBLES.

These are my sentiments; and to them I subscribe my name: and were I a man of ability and consequence enough to address the PUBLIC, with that name should they appear.

I am, &c.

TO MR. JAMES JOHNSON, ENGRAVER,

LAWNMARKET, EDINBURGH.

DUMFRIES, March, 1795.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

For Hyslop's plate, many thanks for your goodness: I have made him a present of it—a present he well deserved at my hand.[2] Thank you likewise for the copies of my Volunteer Ballad: our friend has done indeed well. 'Tis chaste and beautiful; I have not met with any thing has pleased me so much.[3] You know I am no connoisseur; but that I am an amateur will be allowed me. I return you your packet of songs; and in a day or two, by post, expect to hear at large from yours affectionately,

R. B.

[1] This was an oration against the continuance of the war delivered in the debate on the Address, 30th Dec. 1794.

[2] This apparently refers to a bill-heading engraved by Johnson for Hyslop of the Globe Tavern.

[3] The ballad commencing "Does haughty Gaul invasion threat," for which Stephen Clark composed the music, characterized above as "chaste and beautiful."

TO RICHARD A. OSWALD, ESQ.,[4]

OF AUCHINCRUIVE.

DUMFRIES, 23d April, 1795.

SIR,

You see the danger of patronising the rhyming tribe: you flatter the poet's vanity—a most potent ingredient in the composition of a son of rhyme—by a little notice; and he, in return, persecutes your good nature with his acquaintance. In these days of volunteering, I have come forward with my services as poet-laureate to a highly respectable political party, of which you are a distinguished member. The enclosed[5] are, I hope, only a beginning to the songs of triumph which you will earn in that contest.

I have the honour to be, Sir, your obliged and devoted servant,

R. B.

TO MR. JOHN EDGAR, EXCISE OFFICE,

EDINBURGH.

DUMFRIES, 25th April, 1795.

SIR,

I understand that I am to incur censure by the Wine account of this District not being sent in. Allow me to state the following circumstances to you, which, if they do not apologize for, will at least extenuate, my part of the offence.

The General Letter was put into my hands sometime about the beginning of this month, as I was then in charge of the District, Mr. Findlater being indisposed. I immediately, as far as in my power, made a survey of the Wine Stocks; and where I could not personally survey, I wrote the officer of the Division. In a few days more, and previous to collection week, Mr. Findlater resumed charge; and as, in the course of collection, he would have both the officers by him, and the old books among his hands, it very naturally occurred to me the Wine account business would

[4] A young Ayrshire squire of great wealth, living, at the date of this letter, near Dumfries, where he made Burns's acquaintance. He is the "wealthy young Richard" of the second of the Heron election ballads; and his wife is the subject of the song "O wat ye wha's in yon town?"

[5] Probably the "Heron Ballads."

VALD, ESQ.,[1]

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28, 23d April, 1795.

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Sir, your obliged

R. B.

EXCISE OFFICE,

28, 25th April, 1795.

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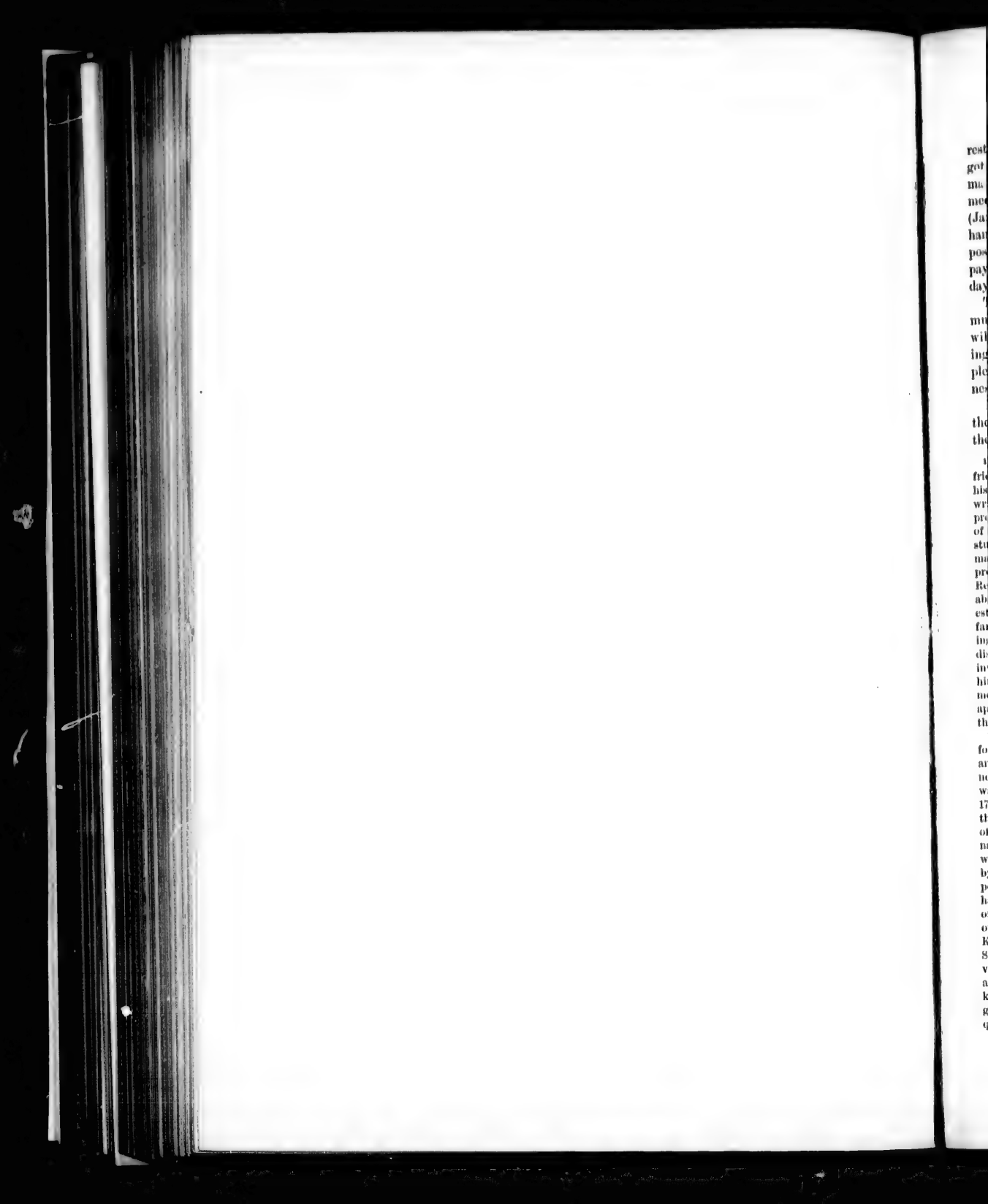

rest with him. At the close of that week I got a note from the collector that the accountm..ing-up was thrown on my hands. I immediately set about it; but one officer's books (James Graham of Sanquhar) not being at hand, I wrote to him to send me them by first post. Mr. Graham has not thought proper to pay the least attention to my request, and today I have sent an express for his stock-book.

This, Sir, is a plain state of facts; and if I must still be thought censurable, I hope it will be considered that this officiating job being my first, I cannot be supposed to be completely master of all the etiquette of the business.

If my supposed neglect has to be laid before the Honourable Board, I beg you will have the goodness to accompany the complaint with this letter. I am, Sir, your very humble servant,

R. B.

TO JOHN SYME, ESQ.[1]

[DUMFRIES, May, 1795.]

You know that among other high dignities, you have the honour to be my supreme court of critical judicature, from which there is no appeal. I enclose you a song which I composed since I saw you, and I am going to give you the history of it.[2] Do you know, that among much that I admire in the characters and manners of those great folks whom I have now the honour to call my acquaintances, the Oswald family, for instance, there is nothing

[1] This gentleman was one of Burns's most intimate friends during his residence in Dumfries, and one of his executors after his decease. His father was a writer to the signet, in extensive practice, and the proprietor of the estate of Barncailzie in the stewartry of Kirkcudbright. Though Mr. Syme in early life studied enough of the law to be afterwards an expert master of all common forms, he preferred the military profession, and, about the year 1773, entered the 72d Regiment with the commission of ensign. Soon after, abandoning this pursuit, he retired to his father's estate, and devoted himself to the life of a gentleman farmer, *improving*, with all possible zeal, and spending much of his leisure time in field sports. But the disaster of the Ayr bank, in whose ruin his father was involved, ultimately proved the means of depriving him of his home at Barncailzie, and in 1791 he removed to Dumfries, to fulfil the duties of a lucrative appointment which he had in the meantime obtained, that of distributor of stamps for the district.

The apartments which he occupied in this capacity formed the ground-floor of a house of no fine appearance in what was then called the Wee Vennel, but is now known as Bank Street, a few yards from the walk along the Nith. When Burns, at the close of 1791, removed from Ellisland to Dumfries, he became the tenant of the floor immediately above Mr. Syme's office; and ere long a friendship of the warmest nature took place between the two. Mr. Syme, who was Burns's senior by a very few years, was enabled, by his connection in the district, to introduce the poet to many people of position. In July, 1793, they had a ride together through Galloway, in the course of which the distributor took the bard to the mansions of Mr. Gordon of Kenmure (afterwards Viscount Kenmure) and the Earl of Selkirk. A letter by Mr. Syme, descriptive of this little tour, will be found in vol. i. in the appendix to the *Life*. Mr. Syme lived at Ryedale, a villa on the west side of the Nith, and kept a most hospitable table, to which men of all grades of rank, provided they possessed estimable qualities, were welcome. Burns was a frequent guest at Ryedale, and we have his own words attesting the esteem in which he held Mr. Syme as a host:—

> Who is proof to thy personal converse and wit,
> Is proof to all other temptation.

Such is the language of an impromptu note written in December, 1795. After the death of Burns Mr. Syme became the most conspicuous resident friend of the family, whose claims on the public he was indefatigable in urging. It was also at his pressing request, joined to that of Mr. Gilbert Burns and Mrs. Dunlop of Dunlop, that Dr. Currie undertook the task of publishing the poet's works, and writing the requisite biographical memoir. Along with Gilbert Burns, Mr. Syme proceeded to Liverpool, and spent three weeks in Dr. Currie's house, for the purpose of giving information respecting the poet, and explaining whatever was obscure with respect to dates and allusions in his writings. The following vivid description of the personal demeanour and aspect of Burns was communicated by him (in 1829) in a letter to Mr. Henry Constable of Edinburgh, who had requested his opinion of a portrait of the poet:—

"The poet's expression," says Mr. Syme, "varied perpetually, according to the idea that predominated in his mind; and it was beautiful to mark how well the play of his lips indicated the sentiment he was about to utter. His eyes and lips, the first remarkable for fire and the second for flexibility, formed at all times an index to his mind, and as sunshine or shade predominated, you might have told *a priori*, whether the company was to be favoured with a scintillation of wit, or a sentiment of benevolence, or a burst of fiery indignation. . . . I cordially concur with what Sir Walter Scott says of the poet's eyes. In his animated moments, and particularly when his anger was aroused by instances of tergiversation, meanness, or tyranny, they were actually like coals of living fire."

Mr. Syme died at Dumfries, on the 24th November, 1831, in the 77th year of his age.

[2] O wat ye wha's in yon town, &c.

See vol. iii. p. 207.

charms me more than Mr. Oswald's unconcealable attachment to that incomparable woman? Did you ever, my dear Syme, meet with a man who owed more to the Divine Giver of all good things than Mr. O.? A fine fortune, a pleasing exterior, self-evident amiable dispositions, and an ingenuous upright mind; and that informed too, much beyond the usual run of young fellows of his rank and fortune: and to all this, such a wo.man!—but of her I shall say nothing at all, in despair of saying anything adequate. In my song I have endeavoured to do justice to what would be his feelings, on seeing, in the scene I have drawn, the habitation of his Lucy. As I am a good deal pleased with my performance, I, in my first fervour, thought of sending it to Mrs. Oswald; but on second thoughts, perhaps what I offer as the honest incense of genuine respect might, from the well-known character of poverty and poetry, be construed into some modification or other of that servility which my soul abhors. Do let me know some convenient moment ere the worthy family leave town, that I may *with propriety* wait on them. In the circle of the fashionable herd, those who come either to show their own consequence, or to borrow consequence from the visit—in such a mob I will not appear; mine is a different errand. Yours,

R. B.

TO WILLIAM CREECH, ESQ.[1]

DUMFRIES, 30th May, [1795].

SIR,

I had intended to have troubled you with a long letter, but at present the delightful sensations of an omnipotent Tooth-ache so engross all my inner man, as to put it out of my power even to write nonsense. However, as in duty bound, I approach my Bookseller with an offering in my hand—a few poetic clinches, and a song:—to expect any other kind of offering from the Rhyming Tribe would be to know them much less than you do. I do not pretend that there is much merit in these *morceaux*, but I have two reasons for sending them: *primo*, they are mostly ill-natured, so are in unison with my present feelings, while fifty troops of infernal spirits are driving post from ear to ear along my jaw bones; and *secondly*, they are so short, that you cannot leave off in the middle, and so hurt my pride in the idea that you found any work of mine too heavy to get through.

I have a request to beg of you, and I not only beg of you, but conjure you, by all your wishes and by all your hopes that the Muse will spare the satiric wink in the moment of your foibles; that she will warble the song of rapture round your Hymeneal couch; and that she will shed on your turf the honest tear of elegiac gratitude! Grant my request as speedily as possible—send me by the very first fly or coach for this place three copies of the last edition of my poems, which place to my account.

Now may the good things of prose, and the good things of verse, come among thy hands, until they be filled with the *good things of this Life*, prayeth

R. B.

TO MR. WM. LORIMER, SENIOR.

FARMER.[2]

[DUMFRIES, Aug. 1795.]

MY DEAR SIR,

I called for you yester-night, both at your own house, and at your favourite lady's—Mrs. Hyslop of the Globe—but could not find you. I want you to dine with me to-day. I have two honest Midlothian Farmers[3] with me, who have travelled threescore miles to renew old friendship with the poet; and I promise you a pleasant party, a plateful of hotch-potch, and a bottle of good sound port.

Mrs. Burns desired me yester-night to beg the favour of Jeany to come and partake with

[1] Cromek gives this letter with the date "Ellisland, 30th May, 1789," but in the original, as Mr. Scott Douglas tells us, the poet has distinctly written "Dumfries, 30th May," but does not give the year. Among the "poetic clinches," alluded to in the letter, are the lines "On seeing Mrs. Kemble in Yarico, 24th October, 1794." The song was "My Chloris, mark how green the groves."

[2] Respecting this gentleman and his daughter Jeany, the "Chloris" of several of Burns's finest songs, see note, vol. iii. p. 186.

[3] One of the Midlothian farmers is certainly Mr. Cleghorn; who the other was is not so certain; in following letter to that gentleman both a Mr. Wight and a Mr. Allan are alluded to as if they had been co-visitors of Burns with Cleghorn.

her, and she was so obliging as to promise that she would. Jeany and you [Mr. Syme, Dr. Maxwell, and Dr. Mundell][1] are all the people besides my Edinburgh friends whom I wish to see, and if you can come, I shall take it very kind. Yours,

R. B.

(Dinner at three.)

TO MR. ROBERT CLEGHORN,

FARMER, SAUGHTON, NEAR EDINBURGH.

DUMFRIES, 21st Aug. 1795.

MY DEAR CLEGHORN,

Enclosed you have Clarke's "Gaffer Gray."[2] I have not time to copy it, so when you have taken a copy for yourself, please return me the original. I need not caution you against giving copies to any other person. "Peggy Ramsay"[3] I shall expect to find in Gaffer Gray's company when he returns to Dumfries.

I intended to have taken advantage of the frank, and given you a long letter; but cross accident has detained me until the Post is just going. Pray has Mr. Wight got the better of his fright?[4] and how is Mr. Allan? I hope you got all safe home. Dr. Maxwell and honest John Syme beg leave to be remembered to you all. They both speak in high terms of the acquisition they have made to their acquaintance. Did Thomson meet you on Sunday? If so, you would have a world of conversation. Mrs. Burns joins in thanks for your obliging, very obliging visit. Yours ever,

R. B.

P.S. Did you ever meet with the following, "Todlin Hame," by the late Mr. M'Culloch of Airdwell, Galloway?

[1] The original is destroyed here, the names being filled in from information contained in subsequent letters.

[2] This was probably an indelicate parody by Burns of Holcroft's song, commencing "Why dost thou shiver and shake, Gaffer Gray?" Stephen Clarke the musician had probably seen it already and mentioned it to Cleghorn.

[3] Perhaps the song beginning "Cauld is the e'ening blast," vol. iii. p. 203.

[4] Mr. Wight had been frightened by a violent thunderstorm during his visit.

TO DAVID STAIG, ESQ.,

PROVOST OF DUMFRIES.

Friday noon [1795].

I know, Sir, that anything which relates to the burgh of Dumfries's interests will engage your readiest attention, so shall make no apology for this letter. I have been for some time turning my attention to a branch of your good town's revenue, where I think there is much to amend; I mean the "Twa pennies" on ale. The Brewers and Victuallers within the jurisdiction pay accurately; but three common brewers in the Bridgend, whose consumpt is almost entirely in Dumfries, pay nothing; the Annan Brewer, who daily sends in great quantities of ale, pays nothing; because in both cases, ale certificates are never asked for; and of all the English ale, porter, &c., scarcely any of it pays. For my part, I never recorded an ale certificate in Dumfries, and I know most of the other officers are in the same predicament. It makes no part of our official duty, and besides, until it is universally assessed on all dealers, it strikes me as injustice to assess one. I know that our Collector has a per centage on the collection; but as it is no great object to him he gives himself no concern about what is *brought in* to the town. Our supervisor would suit you better. He is an abler and a keener man, and what is all-important in the business, such is his official influence over, and power among his offrs. [officers], that were he to signify that such was his wish, not a "pennie" would be left uncollected. It is by no means the case with the Collector. The offrs. are not so immediately among his hands, and they would not pay the same attention to his mandates. Your Brewers here, the Richardsons, one of whom, Gabriel, I survey, pay annually in "twa pennies" about thirty pounds, and they complain, with great justice, of the unfair balance against them in their competition with the Bridgend, Annan, and English traders. As they are respectable characters, both as citizens and men of business, I am sure they will meet with every encouragement from the Magistracy of Dumfries. For their sakes partly I have interested myself in this business, but still much more on account of many obligations which I feel myself to lie

under to Mr. Staig's civility and goodness. Could I be of the smallest service in anything which he has at heart, it would give me great pleasure. I have been at some pains to ascertain what your annual loss on this business may be, and I have reason to think it may amount fully to one-third of what you at present receive. These crude hints, Sir, are for your private use. I have by no means any wish to take a sixpence from Mr. Mitchell's income; nor do I wish to serve Mr. Findlater; I wish to show any attempt I can to do anything that might declare with what sincerity I have the honour to be, Sir, your obliged humble servant, R. B.

P.S. A variety of other methods might be pointed out and will easily occur to your reflection on the subject.[1]

TO MRS. WALTER RIDDELL,

HALLEATHS.

[August, 1795.]

I have perused with great pleasure your elegiac verses. In two or three instances I mark inequalities rather than faults. A line that in an ordinary mediocre production might pass, not only without censure, but with applause, in a brilliant composition glares in all its native halting inferiority. The last line of the second stanza I dislike most. If you cannot mend it (I cannot, after beating my brains to pap), I would almost leave out the whole stanza. *A Dieu je vous recommande.*

R. B.

TO MRS. WALTER RIDDELL,

HALLEATHS.

[August, 1795.]

MADAM,

I think there is little doubt but that your interest, if judiciously directed, may procure a Tide-waiter's place for your protégé Shaw; but alas, that is doing little for him! Fifteen pounds per ann. is the salary, and the perquisites in some lucky stations, such as Leith, Glasgow, or Greenock, may be ten more; but in such a place as this, they will hardly amount to five. The appointment is not in the EXCISE, but in the CUSTOMS. The way of getting appointed is just the application of GREAT FOLKS to the Commissioners of the Customs; the Almanack will give you their names. The Excise is a superior object, as the salary is fifty pounds per annum. You mention that he has a family; if he has more than three children, he cannot be admitted as an Excise Officer. To apply there is the same business as at the Customs. Garthland, if you can command his sincere zeal in the cause, is, I think, able to do either the one or the other. Find out, among your acquaintances, who are the private friends of the Commissioners of the particular BOARD at which you wish to apply, and interest them—the more, the better. The Commissioners of both Boards are people quite in the fashionable circle, and must be known to many of your friends. I was going to mention some of your female acquaintance who might give you a lift, but, on recollection, your interest with the WOMEN is, I believe, a sorry business. So much the better! 'tis God's judgment upon you for making such a despotic use of your sway over the MEN. *You* a Republican! You have an Empire over us; and you know it too; but the Lord's holy name be praised, you have something of the same propensity to get giddy (intoxicated is not a lady's word) with power; and a devilish deal of aptitude to the same blind, undistinguishing FAVOURITISM which makes other Despots less dangerous to the welfare and repose of mankind than they otherwise might be.

So much for scolding you.

I have perused your MSS. with a great deal of pleasure. I have taken the liberty to make a few marks with my pencil, which I trust you will pardon.—Farewell!

R. B.

TO MRS. WALTER RIDDELL,

HALLEATHS.

DUMFRIES, Sept. 1795.

MADAM,

A severe domestic misfortune has put all literary business out of my head for some time

[1] Provost Staig lost no time in obtaining the opinion of counsel on the collection of the dues alluded to in the above letter; and the result being favourable to the town, the impost was accordingly levied.

past.[1] Now I begin to resume my wonted studies. I am much correspondence in your debt. I shall pay it soon. Clarke's Sonatas are of no use to me, and I beg you will keep them.

That you, my Friend, may never experience such a loss as mine, sincerely prays,

R. B.

TO MR. ROBERT CLEGHORN,

SAUGHTON MILLS, PER FAVOUR OF MR. MUNDELL, SURGEON.

[DUMFRIES, January, 1796.]

SONG—THE LASSIE O' MY HEART.

TUNE—"*Morag.*"

O wat ye wha that loes me,
And has my heart a keeping? &c.

See vol. iii. p. 227.

MY EVER DEAR CLEGHORN,

The foregoing had been sent you long ago, but for reasons which you may have heard. Since I saw you, I have been much the child of disaster. Scarcely begun to recover the loss of an only daughter and darling child, I became myself the victim of a rheumatic fever which brought me to the borders of the grave. After many weeks of a sick bed, I am just beginning to crawl about.

Thanks, many thanks for my "Gavin Douglas." This will probably be delivered to you by a friend of mine, Mr. Mundell, Surgeon, whom you may remember to have seen at my house. He wants to enquire after Mr. Allan. Best compliments to the amiablest of my friends, Mrs. Cleghorn, and to little Miss, though she will scarce remember me; and to my thunder-scared friend, Mr. Wight. Yours

R. B.

TO MR. JAMES JOHNSON, ENGRAVER,

MUSIC SHOP, LAWNMARKET, EDINBURGH.

Wednes. Noon [Jan. 1796].

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Mr. Clarke will have acquainted you with the unfortunate reasons of my long silence. When I get a little more health you shall hear from me at large on the subject of the songs.

I am highly pleased with Hyslop's bill;[2] only you have, in your usual luck, misspelt two words: the article "Postages and porter" you have made "Porterages and porter"—pray alter that. In the article "Pipes and Tobacco" you have spelt Tobacco thus "Tobbacco," whereas it ought to be spelt with a single b, thus "Tobacco." When you have amended these two faults, which please do directly, throw off four hundred copies, and send them by the very first coach or fly. Farewell, my ever valued friend!

R. B.

TO MRS. WALTER RIDDELL,

HALLEATHS.

DUMFRIES, 20th January, 1796.

I cannot express my gratitude to you for allowing me a longer perusal of "Anacharsis." In fact, I never met with a book that bewitched me so much; and I, as a member of the library, must warmly feel the obligation you have laid us under. Indeed, to me the obligation is stronger than to any other individual of our society; as "Anacharsis"[3] is an indispensable desideratum to a son of the Muses.

The health you wished me in your morning's card, is, I think, flown from me for ever. I have not been able to leave my bed to-day till about an hour ago. These wickedly unlucky advertisements I lent (I did wrong) to a friend, and I am ill able to go in quest of him.

The Muses have not quite forsaken me. The following detached stanzas I intend to interweave in some disastrous tale of a shepherd, "despairing beside a clear stream."

L'amour, toujours l'amour!
The trout in yonder wimpling burn
That glides, a silver dart, &c.

See vol. iii. p. 224.

[Here also are transcribed the ballad of "Bonnie Jean" and other songs, and the letter concludes thus:]

I cannot help laughing at your friend's conceit of my picture, and I suspect you are play-

[1] This refers to the death of his daughter Elizabeth Riddell Burns, which took place at Mauchline this month.

[2] An engraved heading for a bill or account.

[3] *Travels of Anacharsis the Younger in Greece*, from the French of J. J. Barthélmy, 1791.

ing off on me some of that fashionable wit, called *humbug*. Apropos to pictures, I am just sitting to Reid in this town for a miniature, and I think he has hit by far the best likeness of me ever taken.[1] When you are at any time so idle in town as to call at Reid's painting room, and mention to him that I spoke of such a thing to you, he will show it to you, else he will not; for both the miniature's existence and its destiny are an inviolable secret, and therefore very properly trusted in part to you.

Have you seen Clarke's Sonatas, the subjects from Scots Airs? If not, send for my Copy.

R. B.

TO MR. PETER HILL, BOOKSELLER, EDINBURGH.

DUMFRIES, 29 Jan. 1796.

MY DEAR HILL,

By the chaise, the driver of which brings you this, I send your annual Kipper; but on the express condition that you do not, like a fool as you were last year, put yourself to five times the value in expense of a return.

I have just time to beg that you will make my best compliments to my fair friend, Mrs. Hill, Cameron "my kinsman," and Ramsay[2] "my yoke-fellow in the Lord!" God be with you all! In a week or ten days you shall hear at large from thine

R. B.

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

DUMFRIES, 31st January, 1796.

These many months you have been two packets in my debt[3]—what sin of ignorance I have committed against so highly valued a friend I am utterly at a loss to guess. Alas! Madam, ill can I afford, at this time, to be deprived of any of the small remnant of my pleasures. I have lately drunk deep of the cup of affliction. The autumn robbed me of my only daughter and darling child, and that at a distance too,[4] and so rapidly, as to put it out of my power to pay the last duties to her. I had scarcely begun to recover from that shock, when I became myself the victim of a most severe rheumatic fever, and long the die spun doubtful; until after many weeks of a sick bed, it seems to have turned up life, and I am beginning to crawl across my room, and once indeed have been before my own door in the street.

When pleasure fascinates the mental sight,
Affliction purifies the visual ray,
Religion hails the drear, the untried night,
And shuts, for ever shuts! life's doubtful day.

R. B.

TO MRS. WALTER RIDDELL.

Saturday, 6 p.m. [April, 1796].

Par accident, meeting with Mrs. Scott[5] in the street, and having the miniature[6] in a book in my pocket, I send you it, as I understand that a servant of yours is in town. The painter, in my opinion, has spoilt the likeness. Return me the bagatelle per first opportunity. I am so ill as to be scarce able to hold this miserable pen to this miserable paper.

R. B.

TO MR. JAMES JOHNSON, EDINBURGH.

[DUMFRIES, 17th May, 1796.]

How are you, my dear Friend, and how comes on your fifth volume? You may probably think that for some time past I have neglected you and your work; but, alas! the

[1] Respecting this likeness, see the article "Portraits," in vol. v.

[2] See letter to Hill, Oct. 1794.

[3] Burns's last known letter to the lady was written in Dec.—Jan. 1794–5. Rumours as to Burns's political indiscretions and social indecorums seem to have led her to avoid writing to him. See letter of 12th July, 1796, and note.

[4] This child, Elizabeth Riddell, died in Sept. 1795, under the roof of the Armours at Mauchline, whither she, who had passed all the four years of existence in feeble health, had been sent for change of air.

[5] Wife of Mr. Scott of Tinwald, in whose house Mrs. Riddell was then residing, her thriftless husband having had to dispose of Woodley Park (or rather give it back from failure to pay the purchase money), and also of Friars' Carse, which he inherited from his brother Captain Riddell.

[6] This is, in all likelihood, the miniature of the poet's eldest son, Robert, then about ten years old. See under "Portraits," in vol. v.

hand of pain, and sorrow, and care, has these many months lain heavy on me! Personal and domestic affliction have almost entirely banished that alacrity and life with which I used to woo the rural muse of Scotia. In the meantime, let us finish what we have so well begun. The gentleman, Mr. Lewars, a particular friend of mine, will bring out any proofs (if they are ready) or any message you may have. Farewell!

R. B.

Turn over.

[June 16th.][1]

You should have had this when Mr. Lewars called on you, but his saddle-bags miscarried. I am extremely anxious for your work, as indeed I am for every thing concerning you and your welfare.

You are a good, worthy, honest fellow, and have a good right to live in this world—because you deserve it. Many a merry meeting this Publication has given us, and possibly it may give us more, though, alas! I fear it. This protracting, slow, consuming illness which hangs over me, will, I doubt much, my ever dear friend, arrest my sun before he has well reached his middle career, and will turn over the Poet to far more important concerns than studying the brilliancy of Wit, or the pathos of Sentiment! However, *Hope* is the cordial of the human heart, and I endeavour to cherish it as well as I can.

Let me hear from you as soon as convenient. —Your Work is a great one; and though now that it is near finished, I see if we were to begin again, two or three things that might be mended; yet I will venture to prophesy, that to future ages your publication will be the text-book and standard of Scottish Song and Music.

I am ashamed to ask another favour of you, because you have been so very good already; but my wife has a very particular friend of hers, a young lady who sings well, to whom she wishes to present the *Scots Musical Museum*. If you have a spare copy, will you be so obliging as to send it by the very first *fly*, as I am anxious to have it soon?[2]

Yours ever,

R. B.

TO MRS. WALTER RIDDELL.

DUMFRIES, 4th June, 1796.

I am in such miserable health as to be utterly incapable of showing my loyalty in any way.[3] Rackt as I am with rheumatisms, I meet every face with a greeting, like that of Balak to Balaam—"Come, curse me Jacob; and come, defy me Israel!" So say I—Come, curse me that east wind; and come, defy me the north! Would you have me in such circumstances copy you out a love-song?

I may perhaps see you on Saturday, but I will not be at the ball.—Why should I? "man delights not me, nor woman either!" Can you supply me with the song, "Let us all be unhappy together?"—do if you can, and oblige *le pauvre misérable*.

R. B.

TO MR. CLARKE,

SCHOOLMASTER, FORFAR.

DUMFRIES, 26th June, 1796.

MY DEAR CLARKE,

Still, still the victim of affliction! Were you to see the emaciated figure who now holds

[1] This is in effect two letters written at an interval of about a month, the dates not being quite certain. The first portion should have been handed to Johnson by Lewars, but the latter's saddle-bags containing it had gone astray, and had not been recovered for some time.

[2] "In this humble and delicate manner did poor Burns ask for a copy of a work of which he was principally the founder, and to which he had contributed, *gratuitously*, not less than 184 *original, altered, and collected songs!* The editor has seen 180 transcribed by his own hand for the *Museum*."—CROMEK.—The "particular friend" above referred to is Jessie Lewars, who duly received the copy intended for her, a poetical inscription by Burns being written on the fly-leaf of one of the volumes. See vol. iii. p. 237.

Mr. Johnson died February 26th, 1811. His obituary notice in the *Scots Magazine* runs as follows: "At Edinburgh, much regretted, Mr. James Johnson, engraver, music-seller, and copperplate printer;—being the first who attempted to *strike* music upon pewter, whereby a great saving is made in the charge of that article. Mr. Johnson will long be remembered in the musical world: he published several interesting pieces of late; and in none was more successful than in his elegant work, *The Scots Musical Museum*, in six volumes; concerning which, the celebrated Burns (a few days before his death) writes the publisher."

[3] The 4th of June was the birth-day of George III., and Mrs. Riddell had desired him to go to a birth-day assembly to show his loyalty.

the pen to you, you would not know your old friend. Whether I shall ever get about again, is only known to HIM, the Great Unknown, whose creature I am. Alas, Clarke! I begin to fear the worst. As to my individual self, I am tranquil, and would despise myself if I were not; but Burns's poor widow, and half-a-dozen of his dear little ones—helpless orphans!—there I am weak as a woman's tear. Enough of this! 'Tis half of my disease.

I duly received your last, enclosing the note.[1] It came extremely in time, and I am much obliged by your punctuality. Again I must request you to do me the same kindness. Be so very good as, by return of post, to enclose me *another* note. I trust you can do it without inconvenience, and it will seriously oblige me. If I must go, I shall leave a few friends behind me, whom I shall regret while consciousness remains. I know I shall live in their remembrance. Adieu, dear Clarke. That I shall ever see you again is, I am afraid, highly improbable.

R. B.

TO MR. ALEX. CUNNINGHAM.

BROW,[2] sea-bathing quarters, 7th July, 1796.

MY DEAR CUNNINGHAM,

I received yours here this moment, and am indeed highly flattered with the approbation of the literary circle you mention; a literary circle inferior to none in the two kingdoms. Alas! my friend, I fear the voice of the bard will soon be heard among you no more! For these eight or ten months I have been ailing, sometimes bedfast and sometimes not; but these last three months I have been tortured with an exeruciating rheumatism, which has reduced me to nearly the last stage. You actually would not know me if you saw me.—Pale, emaciated, and so feeble, as occasionally to need help from my chair—my spirits fled! fled!—but I can no more on the subject—only the medical folks tell me that my last and only chance is bathing and country quarters, and riding. The deuce of the matter is this; when an exciseman is off duty, his salary is reduced to £35 instead of £50.—What way, in the name of thrift, shall I maintain myself, and keep a horse in country quarters—with a wife and five children at home, on £35? I mention this, because I had intended to beg your utmost interest, and that of all the friends you can muster, to move our commissioners of Excise to grant me the full salary;[3] I dare say you know them all personally. If they do not grant it me, I must lay my account with an exit truly *en poëte*, if I die not of disease, I must perish with hunger.

I have sent you one of the songs (Lord Gregory); the other my memory does not serve me with, and I have no copy here; but I shall be at home soon, when I will send it you.—Apropos to being at home, Mrs. Burns threatens in a week or two to add one more to my

[1] The letter alluded to reads as follows:—

"FORFAR, 18th Feb. 1796.

"MY DEAR FRIEND,

"Your letter makes me very unhappy; the more so, as I had heard very flattering accounts of your situation some months ago. A note [=twenty-one shillings] is enclosed; and if such partial payments will be acceptable, this shall soon be followed by more. My appointment here has more than answered my expectations; but furnishing a large house, &c., has kept me still very poor; and the persecution I suffered from that rascal, Lord Hopetoun, brought me into expenses, which, with all my economy, I have not yet rubbed off. Be so kind as to write me. Your disinterested friendship has made an impression which time cannot efface. Believe me, my dear Burns, yours in sincerity,

"JAMES CLARKE."

Letters to Mr. Clarke will be found on pp. 200 and 202, and he and his struggle with Lord Hopetoun and others are also mentioned in other letters. He was now paying off money that he had borrowed from Burns.

[2] A hamlet on the shore of the Solway Firth about 9 miles south-east of Dumfries.

[3] See note to *Life*, vol. i. p. 128. But the actual facts as to the reduction of salary seem somewhat hard to get at. Findlater, Burns's immediate superior, writing in 1834 tells us: "Another charge of cruelty has been brought forward against the Board—that of refusing his full salary during his illness, which a little explanation will set to rights. A few years previous to this period, an addition of £15 per annum had been made to the salaries, accompanied with the condition of being stopped to officers not doing duty. This still existed in Burns's time, and he was no worse treated than others in similar circumstances of indisposition. It is here incumbent on me to mention, that Commissioner Graham, regretting, I have no doubt, his inability to comply with the poet's wishes as to the full salary, sent him a private donation of £5, which, I believe, nearly or totally compensated the loss." The £15 recently added, although now kept off from Burns's salary—and Findlater makes no mention of any further reduction—would still have left him £70 instead of £35. In fact Burns seems to have been entirely under a misapprehension.

paternal charge, which, if of the right gender, I intend shall be introduced to the world by the respectable designation of *Alexander Cunningham Burns.*[1] My last was *James Glencairn*, so you can have no objection to the company of nobility. Farewell. R. B.

TO MR. GILBERT BURNS.

BROW, 10th July, 1796.

DEAR BROTHER,

It will be no very pleasing news to you to be told that I am dangerously ill, and not likely to get better. An inveterate rheumatism has reduced me to such a state of debility, and my appetite is so totally gone, that I can scarcely stand on my legs. I have been a week at sea-bathing, and I will continue there, or in a friend's house in the country, all the summer. God keep my wife and children: if I am taken from their head, they will be poor indeed. I have contracted one or two serious debts, partly from my illness these many months, partly from too much thoughtlessness as to expense when I came to town, that will cut in too much on the little I leave them in your hands. Remember me to my mother. Yours, R. B.

TO MR. JAMES ARMOUR, MAUCHLINE.

BROW, July 10, 1796.

For Heaven's sake, and as you value the welfare of your daughter and my wife, do, my dearest Sir, write to Fife to Mrs. Armour to come if possible. My wife thinks she can yet reckon upon a fortnight. The medical people order me, *as I value my existence*, to fly to sea-bathing[2] and country quarters; so it is ten thousand chances to one that I shall not be within a dozen miles of her when the hour comes. What a situation for her, poor girl, without a single friend by her on such a serious moment.

[1] A boy was born on the day of his father's funeral, but he was named Maxwell, after the doctor who attended the poet on his death-bed.

[2] Having this statement under the poet's own hand, it is rather bewildering to come across an assertion of Dr. Currie, founded, doubtless, on Dr. Maxwell's report, that Burns, "impatient of medical advice, as well as of every species of controul, determined for himself to try the effects of bathing in the sea."

I have now been a week at salt-water, and though I think I have got some good by it, yet I have some secret fears that this business will be dangerous if not fatal. Your most affectionate son,

R. B.

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

BROW, Saturday, 12th July, 1796.

MADAM,

I have written you so often, without receiving any answer, that I would not trouble you again, but for the circumstances in which I am. An illness which has long hung about me, in all probability will speedily send me beyond that *bourne whence no traveller returns.* Your friendship, with which for many years you honoured me, was a friendship dearest to my soul. Your conversation, and especially your correspondence, were at once highly entertaining and instructive. With what pleasure did I use to break up the seal! The remembrance yet adds one pulse more to my poor palpitating heart. Farewell!!!

R. B.[3]

[3] Mrs. Dunlop, as we have already mentioned, had become estranged in some measure from Burns, and had not written to him for probably two years, the cause no doubt being the stories that had reached her as to his loose behaviour and indiscretion in regard to politics. According to Dr. Currie, "Burns had, however, the pleasure of receiving a satisfactory explanation of his friend's silence, and an assurance of the continuance of her friendship to his widow and children; an assurance that has been amply fulfilled. It is probable that the greater part of her letters to him were destroyed by our bard about the time that this last was written." It is strange that Dr. Currie says nothing about the nature of the explanation Mrs. Dunlop gave of her silence. According to Chambers Mrs. Burns always maintained that no explanation of any kind ever reached Burns; and it would almost appear that the worthy doctor intentionally misdated one or two of Mrs. Dunlop's letters in order to conceal the fact that Mrs. Dunlop maintained a long silence towards the poet. Nor did Burns destroy the greater part of her letters to him, as appears from the following letter from Gilbert Burns to Dr. Maxwell, dated only two months after the bard's death:—

"MOSSGIEL, 25th Sept. 1796.

"SIR,

"I trouble you at this time on the subject of Mrs. Dunlop's letters. I wrote her on my return from Dumfries, that it had been thought expedient to establish it, as a rule, that the letters from my brother's

TO MR. JAMES BURNESS,

WRITER, MONTROSE.

DUMFRIES, 12th July.

MY DEAREST COUSIN,

When you offered me money assistance, little did I think I should want it so soon. A rascal of a haberdasher, to whom I owe a considerable bill, taking it into his head that I am dying, has commenced a process against me, and will infallibly put my emaciated body into jail. Will you be so good as to accommodate me, and that by return of post, with ten pounds? O, James! did you know the pride of my heart, you would feel doubly for me! Alas! I am not used to beg! The worst of it is, my health was coming about finely, you know, and my physician assures me, that melancholy and low spirits are half my disease: guess, then, my horrors when this business began! If I had it settled, I would be, I think, quite well in a manner. How shall I use the language to you, Oh do not disappoint me! but strong necessity's curst command——

——. . .[1]

correspondents found in his repositories should be retained until they give up at least such of his letters in their hands as might suit publication. She replied that, 'anxious as she is for the recovery of her own letters, and awkward as she feels at their being in the hands of strangers; yet, so far from the retention of them answering the purpose intended, she must consider her doing any thing in consequence of that threat, as betraying a conviction of some impropriety in her letters which she is not conscious of.' I have been last week to wait on her at her own house, and she read to me all my brother's letters to her, numbering about seventy. We marked those which we thought would at all suit publication in whole or in part, to the number of perhaps twenty or thirty, several of which, if I am not a partial judge, will do credit to the writer.

"Mrs. Dunlop proposes copying all the letters marked, and she will allow the editor to compare with the originals such as may be selected for publication; but even this she does not allow me to say, till she has got her own letters back, as she would not be supposed to do any thing from the fear of their being retained. I beg, therefore, that her letters may be sent to me that I may forward them to her; for, besides the opinion I always had that we have no right to retain them, I am now convinced that it can serve no good purpose. Let the letters, such as are recovered, and the rest when they can be collected, be given to Mrs. Burns, who will send them by the carrier to me. I am, Sir, your most obedient servant,

"GILBERT BURNS.

"P.S. My brother had promised Mrs. Dunlop a perusal of the letters he had collected for Mr. Riddell. If these could be sent to her along with her own letters, it would be very obliging to her.

"G. B."

[1] "James Burness sent his cousin ten pounds the moment he received his letter, though he could ill spare the money, and concealed his kindness from the world, till, on reading the life and letters of the poet, he was constrained, in support of his own good name, to conceal it no longer. I was informed by my friend, Dr. Burness, that his grandfather, now in his eighty-fourth year, was touched by the dubious way in which I had left the subject in the poet's life, and felt that he was liable to the imputation of coldness of heart.—In a matter of such delicacy, I could not ask the family, and accordingly had left it as I found it, without comment or remark. The following letters will make all as clear as day, and right my venerable friend in a matter respecting which he cannot be but anxious."—ALLAN CUNNINGHAM.

TO MR. BURNESS, MONTROSE.

"SIR,

"At the desire of Mrs. Burns, I have to acquaint you with the melancholy and much regretted event of your friend's death. He expired on the morning of the 21st, about five o'clock. The situation of the unfortunate Mrs. Burns and her charming boys, your feeling heart can easily paint. It is, however, much to her consolation that a few of his friends, particularly Mr. John Syme, collector of the stamps, and Dr. William Maxwell, both gentlemen of the first respectability and connections, have stepped forward with their assistance and advice; and I think there can be no doubt but that a very handsome provision will be raised for the widow and family. The former of these gentlemen has written to most of the Edinburgh professors with whom either he or Mr. Burns were acquainted, and to several other particular friends. You will easily excuse your not having sooner an answer to your very kind letter, with an acknowledgment of the contents, for, at the time it was received, Mr. Burns was totally unable either to write or dictate a letter, and Mrs. Burns wished to defer answering it till she saw what turn affairs took.

"I am, with much respect, your most obedient and very humble servant,

'JOHN LEWARS.

"DUMFRIES, 23rd July, 1796."

TO MRS. ROBERT BURNS, DUMFRIES.

"MY DEAR COUSIN,

"It was with much concern I received the melancholy news of the death of your husband. Little did I expect, when I had the pleasure of seeing you and him, that a change so sudden would have happened.

"I sincerely sympathize with you in your affliction, and will be very ready to do any thing in my power to alleviate it.

"I am sensible that the education of his family was the object nearest to my cousin's heart, and I hope you will make it your study to follow up his wish by carefully attending to that object, so far as

I have been thinking over and over my brother's affairs, and I fear I must cut him up;[1] but on this I will correspond at another time, particularly as I shall [require] your advice.

Forgive me for once more mentioning by return of post,—save me from the horrors of a jail!

My compliments to my friend James, and to all the rest. I do not know what I have written. The subject is so horrible, I dare not look it over again. Farewell.

R. B.[2]

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may be possible for you; or, if you think of parting with your son, Robert, and will allow me to take charge of him, I will endeavour to discharge towards him the duty of a father, and educate him with my own sons.

"I am happy to hear that something is to be done for you and the family; but as that may take some time to carry it into effect, I beg you will accept of the enclosed five pounds to supply your present necessities.

"My friend mentioned to me that any little thing he had was in the hands of his brother Gilbert, and that the payment of it, at present, would be hard upon him; I have therefore to entreat that, so far as your circumstances will permit, you will use lenity in settling with him.

"I have further to request that you will offer my best thanks to Mr. Lewars for his very friendly letter to me on this melancholy event, with my sincere wishes that such a warm heart as his may never want a friend.

"I shall be glad to hear of your welfare, and your resolution in regard to your son, and I remain, dear cousin, your affectionate friend,

"JAMES BURNESS.

"MONTROSE, 29th July, 1796."

TO MR. BURNESS, MONTROSE.

"DEAR SIR,

"I was duly favoured with your letter of the 29th July.—Your goodness is such as to render it wholly out of my power to make any suitable acknowledgment, or to express what I feel for so much kindness.

"With regard to my son Robert, I cannot as yet determine; the gentlemen here (particularly Dr. Maxwell and Mr. Syme, who have so much interested themselves for me and the family) do not wish that I should come to any resolution as to parting with any of them, and I own my own feelings rather incline me to keep them with me. I think they will be a comfort to me, and my most agreeable companions; but should any of them ever leave me, you, Sir, would be, of all others, the gentleman under whose charge I should wish to see any of them, and I am perfectly sensible of your very obliging offer.

"Since Mr. Lewars wrote you, I have got a young son, who, as well as myself, is doing well.

"What you mention about my brother, Mr. Gilbert Burns, is what accords with my own opinion, and every respect shall be paid to your advice. I am, dear Sir, with the greatest respect and regard, your very much obliged friend,

"JEAN BURNS."

"DUMFRIES, 3rd August, 1796."

This letter would no doubt be written for rather than by Mrs. Burns; it could hardly be her own composition.

[1] That is "must insist on his paying me at least a part of the money I lent him."

TO JAMES GRACIE, ESQ.,

BANKER, DUMFRIES.

BROW, Wednesday Morning,
13th July, 1796.

MY DEAR SIR,

It would [be] doing high injustice to this place not to acknowledge that my rheumatisms have derived great benefits from it already; but, alas! my loss of appetite still continues I shall not need your kind offer *this week*,[3] and I return to town the beginning of next week, it not being a tide week. I am detaining a man in a burning hurry. So, God bless you.

R. B.

TO MRS. BURNS.

BROW, Thursday [14th July, 1796]

MY DEAREST LOVE,

I delayed writing until I could tell you what effect sea-bathing was likely to produce. It would be injustice to deny that it has eased my pains, and I think has strengthened me; but my appetite is still extremely bad. No flesh nor fish can I swallow: porridge and milk are the only thing I can taste. I am very happy to hear, by Miss Jessy Lewars,[4] that you are all well. My very best and kindest compliments to her, and to all the children. I will see you on Sunday. Your affectionate husband,

R. B.

[2] From Brow Burns wrote also two letters to George Thomson, the first on the 4th of July, the second on the 12th—the same day as this letter. In the latter he begged his friend to send him £5, and also inclosed the last song he ever wrote—"Fairest Maid on Devon Banks." See Thomson Correspondence.

[3] Mr. Gracie had kindly offered Burns a post-chaise to bring him home.

[4] That is, by a letter from Miss Jessy Lewars.

TO MR. JOHN CLARK, ESQUIRE,

LOCHERWOODS.

[Brow, 16th July, 1796], Saturd: Nn.

MY DEAR SIR,

My hours of bathing have interfered so unluckily as to have put it out of my power to wait on you.—In the meantime, as the tides are over I anxiously wish to return to town, as I have not heard any news of Mrs. Burns these two days.—Dare I be so bold as to borrow your gig? I have a horse at command, but it threatens to rain, and getting wet is perdition.—Any time about three in the afternoon, will suit me exactly.

Yours most gratefully and sincerely,

R. B.

TO JAMES ARMOUR, MASON,

MAUCHLINE.[1]

DUMFRIES, 18th July, 1796.

MY DEAR SIR,

Do, for heaven's sake, send Mrs. Armour here immediately. My wife is hourly expected to be put to bed. Good God! what a situation for her to be in, poor girl, without a friend! I returned from sea-bathing quarters to-day, and my medical friends would almost persuade me that I am better, but I think and feel that my strength is so gone that the disorder will prove fatal to me. Your son-in-law,

R. B.

[1] This letter to the father of his wife, is *the last* which the poet wrote, being dated only three days before his death. It proves the strength of his care as a husband even in the extremity of his disease.

CORRESPONDENCE WITH CLARINDA.

INTRODUCTION.

Early in December, 1787, during his second stay in Edinburgh, Burns made the acquaintance of the lady who was to become, under the romantic name of Clarinda, the most famous of his correspondents, and the inspirer of some of the finest of his songs. A Miss Nimmo, an elderly lady who seems to have been introduced to the poet by Miss Margaret Chalmers, was a friend also of his future divinity; and in her house, in consequence of the special request of the lady, the two first met at tea. Their attachment, affection, love—call it what you please—seems to have at once begun on both sides. An epistolary correspondence was immediately commenced, and was carried on for some time, especially on the poet's side, with great vigour. Having met with the accident referred to in his second letter, Burns could not accept his fair admirer's invitation to tea on the 8th, and so epistles had to take, for a time, the place of interviews, and in the fifth letter of Burns we find him assuming the name of Sylvander, while the lady's fourth, in reply thereto, is signed Clarinda. It is probable that the assumption of these names had been agreed upon in some letters which have not been preserved.

Clarinda, or, to give her her maiden name, Agnes Craig, was the daughter of a highly respectable surgeon in Glasgow, and was Burns's junior only by three months. She was a full cousin of William Craig, a lord of the Court of Session, and one of the contributors to the *Mirror*, her granduncle was Colin Maclaurin, the mathematician, and friend of Sir Isaac Newton. In early life Miss Craig was considered one of the *belles* of Glasgow. In later years, Dr. Robert Chambers, who knew her, speaks of her thus:—"Of a somewhat voluptuous style of beauty, of lively and easy manners, of a poetical fabric of mind, with some wit, and not too high a degree of refinement and delicacy, she was exactly the kind of woman to fascinate Burns. She might indeed be described as the town-bred or lady analogue of the country maidens who had exercised the greatest power over him in his earlier days."

Her history is a rather singular one. In July, 1776, when only seventeen years of age, she was married to James M'Lehose, a Glasgow law-agent, who, according to a story current in that city, wooed and won her in a peculiar fashion. Having been smitten with the charms of the young beauty, and learning that on a certain day she was to journey from Glasgow to Edinburgh by stage-coach, he took all the other seats in the conveyance, and so had her all to himself for the forty odd miles. So effectually did the brisk wooer urge his suit, that they were engaged before they reached the Scottish metropolis! The union proved an unhappy one. "Only a short time had elapsed," the too confiding lady afterwards wrote, "ere I perceived, with inexpressible regret, that our dispositions, tempers, and sentiments were so totally different as to banish all hopes of happiness." Within five years of the marriage a separation took place, Mrs. M'Lehose having by this time given birth to four children, only two of whom were living when she made the acquaintance of Burns. M'Lehose went some three years afterwards to the West Indies and seemed reckless as to the fate of his wife and children. On the death of her father in 1782 the lady went to reside in Edinburgh (see note to letter xxxix.), her only certain source of income being a small annuity settled on her by her father, her cousin, Lord Craig, however, occasionally assisting her in pecuniary matters. In 1791 her husband unexpectedly invited her to Jamaica, sending the money to defray her expenses.

Early in February, 1792, she sailed in the *Rosette*, the same vessel in which Burns had taken a berth several years before. On her arrival she was mortified to find her husband surrounded by a circle of young Jamaicans of whom he was the father. She was also told by a medical adviser that in her weak state of health she would not be able to hold out long against the warm climate. She determined, therefore, to return with the same vessel in which she went out, and reached Edinburgh in August, 1792. Her death took place in 1841, in a house she had long occupied on the Calton Hill, Edinburgh. She was predeceased by her youngest son, William, in 1790; by her husband, who died at Kingston, Jamaica, in 1812, and by her eldest son, Andrew (who lived to practise as a Writer to the Signet), in 1839. Clarinda appears to have always cherished a fond remembrance of Burns. In her diary she wrote the following entry forty years after their last interview: "6th Dec. 1831.—This day I never can forget. Parted with Burns in the year 1791 never more to meet in this world. Oh, may we meet in Heaven!"

Shortly after Burns's death his friend John Syme exerted himself to procure for Dr. Currie all the available material for a biography of the poet. He wrote to Mrs. M'Lehose respecting the bard's letters to her. She replied:—"On condition that you send me my letters, I will select such passages from our dear bard's letters as will do honour to his memory, and cannot hurt my own fame, even with the most rigid." It was, therefore, arranged that her letters to Burns would be returned to her, but of the selected extracts offered to Mr. Syme, Dr. Currie seems never to have availed himself. Twenty-five of the letters belonging to the Clarinda Correspondence were published in 1802 by Thomas Stewart, bookseller, Glasgow. He obtained copies of them from an unscrupulous literary adventurer, who had begged from Mrs. M'Lehose a perusal of Burns's letters to her, with permission to make some extracts from them, which he meant to introduce into a memoir of the poet he professed to be then engaged on. In spite of an interdict against their circulation obtained by the London publishers of Dr. Currie's edition of the poet's works, and of subsequent legal proceedings, the pirated letters continued to be published in almost every edition of Burns which professed to be complete till after the lady's death. In 1843, however, her grandson, William M'Lehose, was induced to publish a complete collection of the letters which were still in possession of the family, and it is from this authorized edition, with the exception of a few additions and corrections obtained from various other sources, that they have since been reprinted. We give only occasional extracts from the lady's letters.

On the whole we are inclined to think that this portion of the poet's literary remains could have been well spared without much loss to his reputation. The letters are characterized by apparent vehemence of feeling—simplicity of thought and expression is rarely to be found in them; on the contrary, they are too often marked by strained sentiment, laboured diction, and we may venture so far as to add, painfully bombastic rant. Burns had, however, much to excuse him for writing in this vein. He was hardly a year from the plough when this celebrated beauty confessed an admiration for him, and told him she had long sought his company as one whose sentiments and feelings resembled her own. The lady, besides being beautiful, was clever, accomplished, fond of adulation, and above all, full of the liveliest sensibilities. Burns felt himself constrained to *write up* to her sympathies and her expectations of him, and the result is that the letters bear in too many places a forced and exaggerated character. The poet was doubtless fascinated by the attachment of the beauty, and expressed himself in the most rapturous terms regarding her; but it is greatly to be questioned if he really felt the rapture he laboured to express.

No. I.

Thursday Evening [6th Dec. 1787].

MADAM,

I had set no small store by my tea-drinking to-night, and have not often been so disappointed. Saturday evening I shall embrace the opportunity with the greatest pleasure. I leave this town this day se'ennight, and, probably, for a couple of twelvemonths; but must ever regret that I so lately got an acquaintance

I shall ever highly esteem, and in whose welfare I shall ever be warmly interested.

Our worthy common friend, in her usual pleasant way, rallied me a good deal on my new acquaintance, and in the humour of her ideas I wrote some lines, which I inclose you, as I think they have a good deal of poetic merit; and Miss Nimmo tells me you are not only a critic, but a poetess. Fiction, you know, is the native region of poetry; and I hope you will pardon my vanity in sending you the bagatelle as a tolerable off-hand *jeu-d'esprit*.[1] I have several poetic trifles, which I shall gladly leave with Miss Nimmo, or you, if they were worth house room; as there are scarcely two people on earth by whom it would mortify me more to be forgotten, though at the distance of nine score miles.—I am, Madam, with the highest respect, your very humble servant,

ROBT. BURNS.

No. II.

Saturday Evening [8th Dec. 1787].

I can say with truth, Madam, that I never met with a person in my life whom I more anxiously wished to meet again than yourself. To-night I was to have had that very great pleasure. I was intoxicated with the idea; but an unlucky fall from a coach has so bruised one of my knees, that I can't stir my leg; so if I don't see you again, I shall not rest in my grave for chagrin. I was vexed to the soul I had not seen you sooner; I determined to cultivate your friendship with the enthusiasm of religion; but thus has Fortune ever served me. I cannot bear the idea of leaving Edinburgh without seeing you. I know not how to account for it—I am strangely taken with some people, nor am I often mistaken. You are a stranger to me; but I am an odd being: some yet unnamed feelings, things, not principles, but better than whims, carry me farther than boasted reason ever did a philosopher.—Farewell! every happiness be yours!

R. B.

[1] The lines above alluded to seem to have become irrecoverably lost.

No. III.

12th Dec. 1787.

I stretch a point, indeed, my dearest Madam, when I answer your card on the rack of my present agony. Your friendship, Madam! By heavens, I was never proud before. Your lines, I maintain it, are poetry, and good poetry;[2] mine were indeed partly fiction, and partly a friendship which had I been so blest as to have met with you *in time*, might have led me—God of love only knows where. Time is too short for ceremonies.

I swear solemnly (in all the tenor of my former oath) to remember you in all the pride and warmth of friendship until—I cease to be!

To-morrow, and every day, till I see you, you shall hear from me.

Farewell! May you enjoy a better night's repose than I am likely to have.

R. B.

No. IV.

Thursday, 20th Dec. 1787.

Your last, my dear Madam, had the effect on me that Job's situation had on his friends, when "they sat down seven days and seven nights astonished, and spake not a word."[3] "Pay my addresses to a married woman!" I started as if I had seen the ghost of him I had injured: I recollected my expressions; some of them indeed were, in the law phrase, "habit and repute," which is being half guilty. I cannot positively say, Madam, whether my heart might not have gone astray a little; but I can declare, upon the honour of a poet, that the vagrant has wandered unknown to me. I have a pretty handsome troop of follies of my own; and, like some other people's, they are

[2] These lines (inclosed in a letter in which the lady assures Burns of her sympathy and friendship) have gone amissing, like those sent in the poet's first letter, so that we have no idea of the subject of them.

[3] This letter was a reply to one from the lady in which she chides him gently for writing her in his "romantic style." "Do you remember," she goes on to say, with playful raillery, "that she whom you address is a married woman? or—Jacob-like—would you wait seven years; and even then perhaps be disappointed as he was?

but undisciplined blackguards. But the luckless rascals have something like honour in them; they would not do a dishonest thing.

To meet with an unfortunate woman, amiable and young, deserted and widowed by those who were bound by every tie of duty, nature, and gratitude to protect, comfort, and cherish her; add to all, when she is perhaps one of the first of lovely forms and noble minds—the mind, too, that hits one's taste as the joys of heaven do a saint—should a faint idea, the natural child of imagination, thoughtlessly peep over the fence—were you, my friend, to sit in judgment, and the poor, airy straggler brought before you, trembling, self-condemned, with artless eyes, brimful of contrition, looking wistfully on its judge, you could not, my dear Madam, condemn the hapless wretch to death "without benefit of clergy?"

I won't tell you what reply my heart made to your raillery of "seven years," but I will give you what a brother of my trade says on the same allusion:—

> The patriarch to gain a wife,
> Chaste, beautiful, and young,
> Served fourteen years a painful life,
> And never thought it long.
> Oh were you to reward such cares,
> And life so long would stay,
> Not fourteen but four hundred years
> Would seem but as one day.[1]

I have written you this scrawl because I have nothing else to do,[2] and you may sit down and find fault with it, if you have no better way of consuming your time; but finding fault with the vagaries of a poet's fancy is much such another business as Xerxes chastising the waves of the Hellespont.

My limb now allows me to sit in some peace. To walk I have yet no prospect of, as I can't mark it to the ground.

I have just now looked over what I have written, and it is such a chaos of nonsense that I daresay you will throw it into the fire, and call me an idle, stupid fellow; but whatever you think of my brains, believe me to be, with the most sacred respect and heartfelt esteem, my dear Madam, your humble servant,

R. B.

[1] The above is the concluding stanza of a song in D'Urfey's *Pills to Purge Melancholy* (vol. ii. p. 37. Lond. 1719).

[2] His fair correspondent rallied him on this phrase in an impromptu of six stanzas opening thus:—

> When first you saw *Clarinda's* charms,
> What rapture in your bosom grew!
> Her heart was shut to Love's alarms,
> But then—you'd nothing else to do, &c.

No. V.

Friday Evening [28th Dec. 1787].

I beg your pardon, my dear "Clarinda," for the fragment scrawl I sent you yesterday.[3] I really do not know what I wrote. A gentleman, for whose character, abilities, and critical knowledge, I have the highest veneration, called in just as I had begun the second sentence, and I would not make the porter wait. I read to my much-respected friend several of my own bagatelles, and, among others, your lines, which I had copied out. He began some criticisms on them as on the other pieces, when I informed him they were the work of a young lady in this town, which, I assure you, made him stare. My learned friend seriously protested, that he did not believe any young woman in Edinburgh was capable of such lines; and if you know any thing of Professor Gregory, you will neither doubt of his abilities nor his sincerity. I do love you, if possible, still better for having so fine a taste and turn for poesy. I have again gone wrong in my usual unguarded way, but you may erase the word, and put esteem, respect, or any other tame Dutch expression you please, in its place. I believe there is no holding converse, or carrying on correspondence, with an amiable woman, much less a *gloriously amiable fine woman*, without some mixture of that delicious passion, whose most devoted slave I have more than once had the honour of being.—But why be hurt or offended on that account? Can no honest man have a prepossession for a fine woman, but he must run his head against an intrigue? Take a little of the tender witchcraft of love, and add it to the generous, the honourable sentiments of manly friendship; and I know but *one* more delightful morsel, which few, few in any rank ever taste. Such

[3] All trace of this "fragment scrawl" is now lost. Accompanying it were the verses beginning:—

> When dear Clarinda, matchless fair, &c.

[See Poems, vol. ii. p. 238.]

a composition is like adding cream to strawberries; it not only gives the fruit a more elegant richness, but has a peculiar deliciousness of its own.

I inclose you a few lines I composed on a late melancholy occasion.[1] I will not give above five or six copies of it at all, and I would be hurt if any friend should give any copies without my consent.

You cannot imagine, Clarinda (I like the idea of Arcadian names in a commerce of this kind,) how much store I have set by the hopes of your future friendship. I do not know if you have a just idea of my character, but I wish you to see me *as I am*. I am, as most people of my trade are, a strange Will-o'-Wisp being; the victim, too frequently, of much imprudence and many follies. My great constituent elements are *pride* and *passion*. The first I have endeavoured to humanize into integrity and honour; the last makes me a devotee, to the warmest degree of enthusiasm, in love, religion, or friendship—either of them, or all together, as I happen to be inspired. 'Tis true, I never saw you but once; but how much acquaintance did I form with you in that once! Do not think I flatter you, or have a design upon you, Clarinda; I have too much pride for the one, and too little cold contrivance for the other; but of all God's creatures I ever could approach in the beaten way of acquaintance, you struck me with the deepest, the strongest, the most permanent impression. I say the most permanent, because I know myself well, and how far I can promise either on my prepossessions or powers. Why are you unhappy? And why are so many of our fellow-creatures, unworthy to belong to the same species, with you, blest with all they can wish? You have a hand all benevolent to give—Why were you denied the pleasure? You have a heart formed—gloriously formed—for all the most refined luxuries of love: Why was that heart ever wrung? O Clarinda! shall we not meet in a state, some yet unknown state of being, where the lavish hand of Plenty shall minister to the highest wish of Benevolence; and where the chill north-wind of Prudence shall never blow over the flowery fields of Enjoyment? If we do not, man was made in vain! I deserved most of the unhappy hours that have lingered over my head; they were the wages of my labour: but what unprovoked demon, malignant as hell, stole upon the confidence of unmistrusting busy Fate, and dashed *your* cup of life with undeserved sorrow?

Let me know how long your stay will be out of town; I shall count the hours till you inform me of your return. Cursed *etiquette* forbids your seeing me just now; and so soon as I can walk I must bid Edinburgh adieu. Lord, why was I born to see misery which I cannot relieve, and to meet with friends whom I cannot enjoy? I look back with the pang of unavailing avarice on my loss in not knowing you sooner: all last winter, these three months past, what luxury of intercourse have I not lost! Perhaps, though, 'twas better for my peace. You see I am either above, or incapable of dissimulation. I believe it is want of that particular genius. I despise design, because I want either coolness or wisdom to be capable of it. I am interrupted.—Adieu! my dear Clarinda![2]

SYLVANDER.

No. VI.

Tuesday, 3d Jan. 1788.

MY DEAR CLARINDA,

Your last verses have so delighted me, that I have copied them in among some of my own most valued pieces, which I keep sacred for

[1] The lines are those on the death of Lord President Dundas. See vol. ii. p. 234.

[2] Clarinda's answer to the above contains the following passages: "Like yourself, I am a bit of an enthusiast. In religion and friendship quite a bigot—perhaps I could be so in love too; but everything dear to me in heaven and earth forbids! This is my fixed principle; and the person who would dare to endeavour to remove it I would hold as my chief enemy. Like you, I am incapable of dissimulation: nor am I, as you suppose, unhappy. . . . Religion, the only refuge of the unfortunate, has been my balm in every woe. O! could I make her appear to you as she has done to me!" In a long letter written several days after (Jan. 1, 1788) she thanks Sylvander for his lines on the death of Lord President Dundas, saying, "They are very pretty: I like the idea of personifying the vices rising in the absence of *Justice*." "You say, 'there is no corresponding with an agreeable woman without a mixture of the tender passion.' I believe there is no friendship between people of sentiment of different sexes, without a little *softness;* but when kept with'n proper bounds, it only serves to give a higher relis.. to such intercourse."

my own use. Do let me have a few now and then.

Did you, Madam, know what I feel when you talk of your sorrows!

Good God! that one, who has so much worth in the sight of heaven, and is so amiable to her fellow-creatures, should be so unhappy! I can't venture out for cold. My limb is vastly better; but I have not any use of it without my crutches. Monday, for the first time, I dine in a neighbour's, next door. As soon as I can go so far, *even in a coach*, my first visit shall be to you. Write me when you leave town, and immediately when you return; and I earnestly pray your stay may be short. You can't imagine how miserable you made me when you hinted to me not to write. Farewell.[1]

SYLVANDER.

No. VII.

[Thursday, Jan. 3, 1788.]

You are right, my dear Clarinda: a friendly correspondence goes for nothing, except one write their undisguised sentiments. Yours please me for their intrinsic merit, as well as because they are *yours*, which, I assure you, is to me a high recommendation. Your religious sentiments, Madam, I revere. If you have, on some suspicious evidence, from some lying oracle, learned that I despise or ridicule so sacredly important a matter as real religion, you have, my Clarinda, much misconstrued your friend.—"I am not mad, most noble Festus!" Have you ever met a perfect character? Do we not sometimes rather exchange faults than get rid of them? For instance, I am perhaps tired with, and shocked at a life too much the prey of giddy inconsistencies and thoughtless follies; by degrees I grow sober, prudent, and statedly pious—I say statedly, because the most unaffected devotion is not at all inconsistent with my first character—I join the world in congratulating myself on the happy change. But let me pry more narrowly into this affair. Have I, at bottom, any thing of a secret pride in these endowments and emendations? Have I nothing of a presbyterian sourness, an hypocritical severity, when I survey my less regular neighbours? In a word, have I missed all those nameless and numberless modifications of indistinct selfishness, which are so near our own eyes, that we can scarcely bring them within the sphere of our vision, and which the known spotless cambric of our character hides from the ordinary observer?

My definition of worth is short; truth and humanity respecting our fellow-creatures; reverence and humility in the presence of that Being, my Creator and Preserver, and who, I have every reason to believe, will one day be my Judge. The first part of my definition is the creature of unbiassed instinct; the last is the child of after reflection. Where I found these two essentials, I would gently note, and slightly mention, any attendant flaws—flaws, the marks, the consequences of human nature.

I can easily enter into the sublime pleasures that your strong imagination and keen sensibility must derive from religion, particularly if a little in the shade of misfortune; but I own I cannot, without a marked grudge, see Heaven totally engross so amiable, so charming a woman, as my friend Clarinda; and should be very well pleased at *a circumstance* that would put it in the power of somebody (happy somebody!) to divide her attention, with all the delicacy and tenderness of an earthly attachment.

[1] Clarinda's epistle (dated 3d January), to which the above is the reply, contained the following passages and poem:—

"At this season, when others are joyous, I am the reverse. I have no *near* relations; and while others are with theirs, I sit alone, musing upon several of mine with whom I used to be—now gone to the land of forgetfulness.

"You have put me in a rhyming humour. The moment I read yours, I wrote the following lines:—

Talk not of Love! it gives me pain,
For Love has been my foe:
He bound me in an iron chain,
And plunged me deep in woe!

But Friendship's pure and lasting joys
My heart was formed to prove;
The worthy object be of those,
But never talk of Love.

The 'Hand of Friendship' I accept,
May Honour be our guard!
Virtue our intercourse direct,
Her smiles our dear reward.

. . . Do you think you could venture this length in a coach without hurting yourself? I go out of town the beginning of the week for a few days. I wish you could come to-morrow or Saturday," &c.

You will not easily persuade me that you have not a grammatical knowledge of the English language.—So far from being inaccurate, you are elegant beyond any woman of my acquaintance, except one, whom I wish you knew.[1]

Your last verses to me have so delighted me, that I have got an excellent old Scots air that suits the measure, and you shall see them in print in the *Scots Musical Museum*, a work publishing by a friend of mine in this town. I want four stanzas; you gave me but three, and one of them alluded to an expression in my former letter; so I have taken your two first verses, with a slight alteration in the second, and have added a third; but you must help me to a fourth. Here they are: the latter half of the first stanza would have been worthy of Sappho; I am in raptures with it.

Talk not of Love, it gives me pain,
For Love has been my foe:
He bound me with an iron chain,
And sunk me deep in woe.

But Friendship's pure and lasting joys
My heart was formed to prove:
There, welcome, win and wear the prize,
But never talk of love.

Your friendship much can make me blest,
O why that bliss destroy!
[only]
Why urge the odious one request,
[will]
You know I must deny?

The alteration in the second stanza is no improvement, but there was a slight inaccuracy in your rhyme. The third I only offer to your choice, and have left two words for your determination. The air is "The banks of Spey," and is most beautiful.[2]

To-morrow evening I intend taking a chair, and paying a visit at Park Place to a much-valued old friend. If I could be sure of finding you at home, (and I will send one of the chairmen to call) I would spend from five to six o'clock with you, as I go past. I cannot do more at this time, as I have something on my hand that hurries me much. I propose giving you the first call, my old friend the second, and Miss Nimmo as I return home. Do not break any engagement for me, as I will spend another evening with you at any rate before I leave town.

Do not tell me that you are pleased when your friends inform you of your faults. I am ignorant what they are; but I am sure they must be such evanescent trifles, compared with your personal and mental accomplishments, that I would despise the ungenerous narrow soul who would notice any shadow of imperfections you may seem to have, any other way than in the most delicate agreeable raillery. Coarse minds are not aware how much they injure the keenly feeling tie of bosom-friendship, when, in their foolish officiousness, they mention what nobody cares for recollecting. People of nice sensibility, and generous minds, have a certain intrinsic dignity, that fires at being trifled with, or lowered, or even too nearly approached.

You need make no apology for long letters: I am even with you. Many happy new years to you, charming Clarinda! I can't dissemble, were it to shun perdition. He who sees you as I have done, and does not love you, deserves to be damn'd for his stupidity! He who loves you, and would injure you, deserves to be doubly damn'd for his villany! Adieu.

SYLVANDER.

P.S. What would you think of this for a fourth stanza?

Your thought, if love must harbour there,
Conceal it in that thought,
Nor cause me from my bosom tear
The very friend I sought.

No. VIII.

Saturday Noon, 5th Jan. 1788.

Some days, some nights, nay, some *hours*, like the "ten righteous persons in Sodom," save the rest of the vapid, tiresome, miserable months and years of life. One of these hours my dear Clarinda blest me with yesternight.

One well spent hour,
In such a tender circumstance for friends,
Is better than an age of common time!

THOMSON

[1] Probably Miss Margaret Chalmers. See General Correspondence.

[2] The song appeared in the second volume of the *Museum*. The bracketed readings "only" and "will" are there adopted; and there is as a fourth stanza the one that Burns proposes in his postscript to this letter.

My favourite feature in Milton's Satan is his manly fortitude in supporting what cannot be remedied—in short, the wild broken fragments of a noble exalted mind in ruins. I meant no more by saying he was a favourite hero of mine.

I mentioned to you my letter to Dr. Moore, giving an account of my life: it is truth, every word of it; and will give you the just idea of a man whom you have honoured with your friendship. I am afraid you will hardly be able to make sense of so torn a piece.—Your verses I shall muse on, deliciously, as I gaze on your image in my mind's eye, in my heart's core: they will be in time enough for a week to come. I am truly happy your head-ache is better.—O, how can pain or evil be so daringly, unfeelingly, cruelly savage, as to wound so noble a mind, so lovely a form!

My little fellow is all my name-sake.[1]—Write me soon. My every, strongest good wishes attend you, Clarinda!

SYLVANDER.

I know not what I have written—I am pestered with people around me.

No. IX.

Tuesday Night [8th Jan. 1788].

I am delighted, charming Clarinda, with your honest enthusiasm for religion.[2] Those of either sex, but particularly the female, who are lukewarm in that most important of all things, "O my soul, come not thou into their secrets!"

I feel myself deeply interested in your good opinion, and will lay before you the outlines of my belief. He, who is our Author and Preserver, and will one day be our Judge, must be (not for his sake in the way of duty, but from the native impulse of our hearts) the object of our reverential awe and grateful adoration: He is Almighty and all-bounteous, we are weak and dependent; hence prayer and every other sort of devotion.——"He is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to everlasting life;" consequently it must be in every one's power to embrace his offer of "everlasting life;" otherwise he could not, in justice, condemn those who did not. A mind pervaded, actuated, and governed by purity, truth, and charity, though it does not *merit* heaven, yet is an absolutely necessary pre-requisite, without which heaven can neither be obtained nor enjoyed; and, by divine promise, such a mind shall never fail of attaining "everlasting life:" hence the impure, the deceiving, and the uncharitable exclude themselves from eternal bliss, by their unfitness for enjoying it. The Supreme Being has put the immediate administration of all this, for wise and good ends known to himself, into the hands of Jesus Christ, a great personage, whose relation to him we cannot comprehend, but whose relation to us is a Guide and Saviour; and who, except for our own obstinacy and misconduct, will bring us all, through various ways, and by various means, to bliss at last.

These are my tenets, my lovely friend; and which, I think, cannot be well disputed. My creed is pretty nearly expressed in the last clause of Jamie Dean's grace, an honest weaver in Ayrshire: "Lord, grant that we may lead a gude life! for a gude life maks a gude end, at least it helps weel!"

I am flattered by the entertainment you tell me you have found in my packet.[3] You see me as I have been, you know me as I am, and may guess at what I am likely to be. I too may say, "Talk not of love," &c., for indeed he has "plunged me deep in woe!" Not that I ever saw a woman who pleased unexceptionably, as my Clarinda elegantly says, "in the companion, the friend, and the mistress." *One* indeed I could except—*One*, before passion threw its mists over my discernment, I knew, *the* first of women! Her name is indelibly written in my heart's core—but I dare not look in on it—a degree of agony would be the consequence. Oh! thou perfidious, cruel, mischief-making demon, who presidest over that frantic passion—thou mayest, thou dost poison my peace, but thou shalt not taint my honour—I would not, for a single

[1] The poet's son, Robert, born 3d Sept. 1786.

[2] Clarinda's letter of the previous day contained a good deal on the subject of religion, and especially Calvinism, to which system of doctrines she declared her adherence, hoping that Burns would also take the matter into serious consideration.

[3] His autobiography, which he drew out for Dr. Moore.

moment, give an asylum to the most distant imagination, that would shadow the faintest outline of a selfish gratification, at the expense of her whose happiness is twisted with the threads of my existence.——May she be as happy as she deserves! And if my tenderest, faithfulest friendship, can add to her bliss, I shall at least have one solid mine of enjoyment in my bosom! *Don't guess at these ravings!*

I watched at our front window to-day, but was disappointed.[1] It has been a day of disappointments. I am just risen from a two hours' bout after supper, with silly or sordid souls, who could relish nothing in common with me but the port.——*One*—'tis now "witching time of night;" and whatever is out of joint in the foregoing scrawl, impute it to enchantments and spells; for I can't look over it, but will seal it up directly, as I don't care for to-morrow's criticisms on it.

You are by this time fast asleep, Clarinda; may good angels attend and guard you as constantly and faithfully as my good wishes do.

> Beauty, which, whether waking or asleep,
> Shot forth peculiar graces.

John Milton, I wish thy soul better rest than I expect on my pillow to-night! O for a little of the cart-horse part of human nature! Good night, my dearest Clarinda!

SYLVANDER.

No. X.

Thursday Noon [10th Jan. 1788].

I am certain I saw you, Clarinda; but you don't look to the proper story for a poet's lodging—

> Where speculation roosted near the sky.

I could almost have thrown myself over for very vexation. Why didn't you look higher? It has spoiled my peace for this day. To be so near my charming Clarinda; to miss her look when it was searching for me—I am sure the soul is capable of disease, for mine has convulsed itself into an inflammatory fever.[2] I am sorry for your little boy: do let me know to-morrow how he is.[3]

You have converted me, Clarinda. (I shall love that name while I live: there is heavenly music in it.) Booth and Amelia I know well.[4] Your sentiments on that subject, as they are on every subject, are just and noble. "To be feelingly alive to kindness, and to unkindness," is a charming female character.

What I said in my last letter, the powers of fuddling sociality only know for me. By yours, I understand my good star has been partly in my horizon, when I got wild in my reveries. Had that evil planet, which has almost all my life shed its baleful rays on my devoted head, been, as usual, in my zenith, I had certainly blabbed something that would have pointed out to you the dear object of my tenderest friendship, and, in spite of me, something more. Had that fatal information escaped me, and it was merely chance, or kind stars, that it did not, I had been undone! You would never have written me, except perhaps *once* more! O, I could curse circumstances, and the coarse tie of human laws, which keeps fast what common sense would loose, and which bars that happiness itself cannot give—happiness which otherwise Love and Honour would warrant! But hold—I shall make no more "hairbreadth 'scapes."

My friendship, Clarinda, is a life-rent business. My likings are both strong and eternal. I told you I had but one male friend: I have but two female. I should have a third, but she is surrounded by the blandishments of flattery and courtship. The name I register in my heart's core is Peggy Chalmers. Miss Nimmo can tell you how divine she is. She is worthy of a place in the same bosom with my Clarinda. That is the highest compliment I can pay her. Farewell, Clarinda! Remember

SYLVANDER.

[1] This refers to the following passage in Clarinda's letter of the previous day:—"I am probably to be in your Square this afternoon, near two o'clock. If your room be to the street, I shall have the pleasure of giving you a nod."

[2] This is said in reference to a further promise of Clarinda's to look up to his window in hope of seeing him as she passed by.

[3] Clarinda had just written him of the illness of her youngest boy.

[4] The principal characters of Fielding's novel *Amelia*. Booth is the unfaithful, dissipated, but good-natured repentant husband of his virtuous and forgiving Amelia. Clarinda declares Booth to be "infinitely preferred to a brutal though perhaps constant husband."

No. XI.

Saturday Morning [12th Jan. 1788].

Your thoughts on religion, Clarinda, shall be welcome. You may perhaps distrust me, when I say 'tis also *my* favourite topic; but mine is the religion of the bosom. I hate the very idea of a controversial divinity; as I firmly believe, that every honest upright man, of whatever sect, will be accepted of the Deity. If your verses, as you seem to hint, contain censure, except you want an occasion to break with me, don't send them. I have a little infirmity in my disposition, that where I fondly love, or highly esteem, I cannot bear reproach.[1]

"Reverence thyself" is a sacred maxim, and I wish to cherish it. I think I told you Lord Bolingbroke's saying to Swift—"Adieu, dear Swift, with all thy faults I love thee entirely; make an effort to love me with all mine." A glorious sentiment, and without which there can be no friendship! I do highly, very highly esteem you indeed, Clarinda—you merit it all! Perhaps, too—I scorn dissimulation!—I could fondly love you: judge then what a maddening sting your reproach would be. "O! I have sins to *Heaven*, but none to *you!*"—With what pleasure would I meet you to-day, but I cannot walk to meet the fly. I hope to be able to see you, *on foot*, about the middle of next week.

I am interrupted—perhaps you are not sorry for it, you will tell me—but I won't anticipate blame. O Clarinda! did you know how dear to me is your look of kindness, your smile of approbation! you would not, either in prose or verse, risk a censorious remark.

Curst be the verse, how well soe'er it flow,
That tends to make one worthy man my foe!

SYLVANDER.

[1] The above is a reply to the following passages in Clarinda's letter of the 10th:—"My next will be on my favourite theme—religion . . . [Miss Nimmo] has almost wept to me at mentioning your intimacy with a certain famous, or rather infamous man in town [probably William Nicol] . . . I composed lines addressed to you some time ago, containing a hint upon the occasion. I had not courage to send them then; if you say you'll not be angry, I will yet."

No. XII.

Saturday [12th Jan. 1788].

You talk of weeping, Clarinda! Some involuntary drops wet your lines as I read them. *Offend me*, my dearest angel! You cannot offend me—you never offend me. If you had ever given me the least shadow of offence, so pardon me, my God, as I forgive Clarinda. I have read yours again; it has blotted my paper. Though I find your letter has agitated me into a violent headache, I shall take a chair, and be with you about eight. A friend is to be with us to tea, which hinders me from coming sooner. Forgive, my dearest Clarinda, my unguarded expressions! For Heaven's sake, forgive me, or I shall never be able to bear my own mind.—Your unhappy

SYLVANDER.

No. XIII.

Monday Evening, 11 o'clock,
[14th Jan. 1788].

Why have I not heard from you, Clarinda? To-day I expected it; and before supper, when a letter to me was announced, my heart danced with rapture: but behold, 'twas some fool, who had taken it into his head to turn poet, and made me an offering of the first-fruits of his nonsense. "It is not poetry, but prose run mad."

Did I ever repeat to you an epigram I made on a Mr. Ephinstone, who has given a translation of Martial, a famous Latin poet? The poetry of Ephinstone can only equal his prose notes. I was sitting in a merchant's shop of my acquaintance, waiting somebody; he put Elphinstone[2] into my hand, and asked my opinion of it; I begged leave to write it on a blank leaf, which I did.

[2] James Elphinstone, the translator of Martial, was a native of Edinburgh, and the proprietor of a boarding-school at Kensington, London, where he was sometimes visited by Dr. Johnson. He is repeatedly mentioned in Boswell's *Life*, which also contains two letters to him from Johnson, by whom he was much esteemed. He brought out an edition of the *Rambler* at Edinburgh, with translations of the mottoes. Dr. Beattie describes his translation of Martial to be truly unique. "The specimens . . . did very well to laugh at; but a whole quarto of nonsense and gibberish is too much."

TO MR. ELPHINSTONE, &c

O thou, whom poesy abhors,
Whom prose has turned out of doors!
Heardst thou yon groan? proceed no further!
'Twas laurel'd Martial calling murther!

I am determined to see you, if at all possible, on Saturday evening. Next week I must sing—

The night is my departing night,
The morn's the day I maun awa';
There's neither friend nor foe o' mine
But wishes that I were awa'!
What I hae done for lack o' wit,
I never, never can reca';
I hope ye're a' my friends as yet,
Gude night, and joy be wi' you a'!

If I could see you sooner, I would be so much the happier; but I would not purchase the *dearest gratification* on earth, if it must be at your expense in worldly censure, far less inward peace!

I shall certainly be ashamed of thus scrawling whole sheets of incoherence. The only *unity* (a sad word with poets and critics!) in my ideas, is CLARINDA. There my heart "reigns and revels."

What art thou, Love? whence are those charms,
That thus thou bear'st an universal rule?
For thee the soldier quits his arms,
The king turns slave, the wise man fool.
In vain we chase thee from the field,
And with cool thoughts resist thy yoke:
Next tide of blood, alas! we yield;
And all those high resolves are broke!

I like to have quotations for every occasion. They give one's ideas so pat, and save one the trouble of finding expression adequate to one's feelings. I think it is one of the greatest pleasures attending a poetic genius, that we can give our woes, cares, joys, loves, &c. an embodied form in verse, which, to me, is ever immediate ease. Goldsmith says finely of his Muse—

Thou source of all my bliss and all my woe;
Thou found'st me poor at first and keep'st me so.

My limb has been so well to-day, that I have gone up and down stairs often without my staff. To-morrow I hope to walk once again on my own legs to dinner. It is only next street.—Adieu.

SYLVANDER.

No. XIV.

Tuesday Evening [15th Jan. 1788].

That you have faults, my Clarinda, I never doubted; but I knew not where they existed, and Saturday night made me more in the dark than ever. O Clarinda! why will you wound my soul, by hinting that last night must have lessened my opinion of you? True, I was "behind the scenes with you;"[1] but what did I see? A bosom glowing with honour and benevolence; a mind ennobled by genius, informed and refined by education and reflection, and exalted by native religion, genuine as in the climes of heaven; a heart formed for all the glorious meltings of friendship, love, and pity. These I saw.—I saw the noblest immortal soul creation ever showed me.

I looked long, my dear Clarinda, for your letter; and am vexed that you are complaining. I have not caught you so far wrong as in your idea, that the commerce you have with *one* friend hurts you, if you cannot tell every tittle of it to *another*. Why have so injurious a suspicion of a good God, Clarinda, as to think that Friendship and Love, on the sacred inviolate principles of Truth, Honour, and Religion, can be any thing else than an object of his divine approbation?[2]

I have mentioned, in some of my former scrawls, Saturday evening next. Do allow me to wait on you that evening. Oh, my angel! how soon must we part! and when can we meet again! I look forward on the horrid in-

[1] Clarinda, in a letter of 13th Jan., in alluding to Burns's second meeting with her in her own house on Saturday (12th), remarks:—"Sylvander, you saw Clarinda last night behind the scenes. Now you'll be convinced she has faults. If she knows herself her intention is always good; but she is too often the victim of sensibility, and hence is seldom pleased with herself."

[2] In her letter of the 13th Clarinda had said:—"I will not deny it, Sylvander, last night was one of the most exquisite I ever experienced. Few such fall to the lot of mortals! . . . But though our enjoyment did not lead beyond the limits of virtue, yet to-day's reflections have not been altogether unmixed with regret. The idea of the pain it would have given, were it known to a friend to whom I am bound by the sacred ties of gratitude (no more); the opinion Sylvander may have formed from my unreservedness; and, above all, some secret misgivings that Heaven may not approve, situated as I am—these procured me a sleepless night."

terval with tearful eyes! What have I lost by not knowing you sooner! I fear, I fear my acquaintance with you is too short, to make that *lasting* impression on your heart I could wish.

SYLVANDER.

No. XV.

Saturday Morning [19th Jan. 1788].

There is no time, my Clarinda, when the conscious thrilling chords of Love and Friendship give such delight, as in the pensive hours of what our favourite Thomson calls "Philosophic Melancholy." The sportive insects, who bask in the sunshine of Prosperity; or the worms that luxuriant crawl amid their ample wealth of earth—they need no Clarinda: they would despise Sylvander—if they dared. The family of Misfortune, a numerous group of brothers and sisters! they need a resting-place to their souls: unnoticed, often condemned by the world; in some degree, perhaps, condemned by themselves, they feel the full enjoyment of ardent love, delicate tender endearments, mutual esteem and mutual reliance.

In this light I have often admired religion. In proportion as we are wrung with grief, or distracted with anxiety, the ideas of a compassionate Deity, an Almighty Protector, are doubly dear.

'*Tis this*, my Friend, that streaks our morning bright;
'*Tis this* that gilds the horrors of our night.

I have been this morning taking a peep through, as Young finely says, "the dark postern of time long elaps'd;" and, you will easily guess, 'twas a rueful prospect. What a tissue of thoughtlessness, weakness, and folly! My life reminded me of a ruined temple; what strength, what proportion in some parts! what unsightly gaps, what prostrate ruins in others! I kneeled down before the Father of mercies, and said, "Father, I have sinned against Heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son!" I rose, eased and strengthened. I despise the superstition of a fanatic, but I love the religion of a man. "The future," said I to myself, "is still before me;" there let me

On reason build resolve,
That column of true majesty in man!

"I have difficulties many to encounter," said I; "but they are not absolutely insuperable: and where is firmness of mind shown but in exertion? mere declamation is bombastic rant."—Besides, wherever I am, or in whatever situation I may be—

'Tis nought to me:
Since God is ever present, ever felt,
In the void waste as in the city full;
And where He vital breathes, there must be joy!

Saturday Night—half after Ten.

What luxury of bliss I was enjoying this time yesternight! My ever-dearest Clarinda, you have stolen away my soul: but you have refined, you have exalted it: you have given it a stronger sense of virtue, and a stronger relish for piety.—Clarinda, first of your sex, if ever I am the veriest wretch on earth to forget you; if ever your lovely image is effaced from my soul,

May I be lost, no eye to weep my end;
And find no earth that's base enough to bury me!

What trifling silliness is the childish fondness of the every-day children of the world! 'Tis the unmeaning toying of the younglings of the fields and forests: but where Sentiment and Fancy unite their sweets; where Taste and Delicacy refine; where Wit adds the flavour, and Good-sense gives strength and spirit to all, what a delicious draught is the hour of tender endearment!—Beauty and Grace, in the arms of Truth and Honour, in all the luxury of mutual love!

Clarinda, have you ever seen the picture realized? Not in all its very richest colouring, but

Hope, thou nurse of young Desire,
Fair promiser of Joy.

Last night, Clarinda, but for one slight shade, was the glorious picture—

Innocence
Look'd gaily smiling on; while rosy Pleasure
Hid young Desire amid her flowery wreath,
And pour'd her cup luxuriant; mantling high,
The sparkling heavenly vintage, Love and Bliss!

Clarinda, when a poet and poetess of Nature's making, two of Nature's noblest productions! when they drink together of the same cup of

Love and Bliss——attempt not, ye coarser stuff of human nature, profanely to measure enjoyment ye never can know!—Good-night, my dear Clarinda!

SYLVANDER.

No. XVI.

Sunday Night [Jan. 20th, 1788].

The impertinence of fools has joined with a return of an old indisposition, to make me good for nothing to-day. The paper has lain before me all this evening, to write to my dear Clarinda, but—

Fools rush'd on fools, as waves succeed to waves.

I cursed them in my soul; they sacrilegiously disturbed my meditations on her who holds my heart. What a creature is man! A little alarm last night and to-day, that I am mortal, has made such a revolution on my spirits! There is no philosophy, no divinity, comes half so home to the mind. I have no idea of courage that braves heaven. 'Tis the wild ravings of an imaginary hero in bedlam.

I can no more, Clarinda; I can scarcely hold up my head; but I am happy you do not know it, you would be so uneasy.

SYLVANDER.

Monday Morning.

I am, my lovely friend, much better this morning on the whole; but I have a horrid languor on my spirits.

Sick of the world and all its joys,
My soul in pining sadness mourns;
Dark scenes of woe my mind employs,
The past and present in their turns.

Have you ever met with a saying of the great, and likewise good Mr. Locke, author of the famous *Essay on the Human Understanding?* He wrote a letter to a friend, directing it, "not to be delivered till after my decease:" it ended thus—"I know you loved me when living, and will preserve my memory now I am dead. All the use to be made of it is, that this life affords no solid satisfaction, but in the consciousness of having done well, and the hopes of another life. Adieu! I leave my best wishes with you.—J. LOCKE."

Clarinda, may I reckon on your friendship for life? I think I may. Thou almighty Preserver of men! thy friendship, which hitherto I have too much neglected, to secure it shall all the future days and nights of my life, be my steady care! The idea of my Clarinda follows—

Hide it, my heart, within that close disguise,
Where, mix'd with God's, her lov'd idea lies.

But I fear inconstancy, the consequent imperfection of human weakness. Shall I meet with a friendship that defies years of absence, and the chances and changes of fortune? Perhaps "such things are;" *one honest* man I have great hopes from that way: but who, except a romance writer, would think on a *love* that could promise for life, in spite of distance, absence, chance, and change; and that too, with slender hopes of fruition? For my own part, I can say to myself in both requisitions, "Thou art the man!" I dare, in cool resolve I dare, declare myself that friend, and that lover. If womankind is capable of such things, Clarinda is. I trust that she is; and feel I shall be miserable if she is not. There is not one virtue which gives worth, or one sentiment which does honour to the sex, that she does not possess superior to any woman I ever saw: her exalted mind, aided a little perhaps by her situation, is, I think, capable of that nobly-romantic love-enthusiasm.

May I see you on Wednesday evening, my dear angel? The next Wednesday again will, I conjecture, be a hated day to us both. I tremble for censorious remark, for your sake; but in extraordinary cases, may not usual and useful precaution be a little dispensed with? Three evenings, three swift-winged evenings, with pinions of down, are all the past; I dare not calculate the future. I shall call at Miss Nimmo's to-morrow evening; 'twill be a farewell call.

I have wrote out my last sheet of paper, so I am reduced to my last half-sheet. What a strange mysterious faculty is that thing called imagination! We have no ideas almost at all of another world; but I have often amused myself with visionary schemes of what happiness might be enjoyed by small alterations—alterations that we can fully enter into, in this present state of existence. For instance, sup-

pose you and I just as we are at present; the same reasoning powers, sentiments, and even desires; the same fond curiosity for knowledge and remarking observation in our minds; and imagine our bodies free from pain and the necessary supplies for the wants of nature at all times, and easily within our reach: imagine further, that we were set free from the laws of gravitation, which bind us to this globe, and could at pleasure fly, without inconvenience, through all the yet unconjectured bounds of creation, what a life of bliss would we lead, in our mutual pursuit of virtue and knowledge, and our mutual enjoyment of friendship and love!

I see you laughing at my fairy fancies, and calling me a voluptuous Mahometan; but I am certain I would be a happy creature, beyond any thing we call bliss here below; nay, it would be a paradise congenial to you too. Don't you see us, hand in hand, or rather, my arm about your lovely waist, making our remarks on Sirius, the nearest of the fixed stars; or surveying a comet, flaming innoxious by us, as we just now would mark the passing pomp of a travelling monarch; or in a shady bower of Mercury or Venus, dedicating the hour to love, in mutual converse, relying honour, and revelling endearment, whilst the most exalted strains of poesy and harmony would be the ready spontaneous language of our souls? Devotion is the favourite employment of your heart; so is it of mine; what incentives then to, and powers for, reverence, gratitude, faith, and hope, in all the fervours of adoration and praise to that Being whose unsearchable wisdom, power, and goodness, so pervaded, so inspired, every sense and feeling! —By this time, I dare say, you will be blessing the neglect of the maid that leaves me destitute of paper!

SYLVANDER.

No. XVII.

[Monday, 21st Jan.[1] 1788.]

. . . I am a discontented ghost, a perturbed spirit. Clarinda, if ever you forget Sylvander, may you be happy, but he will be miserable.

[1] The true date of this letter is not known. Both Hately Waddell and Chambers place it in February.

O what a fool I am in love! what an extraordinary prodigal of affection! Why are your sex called the tender sex, when I have never met with one who can repay me in passion? They are either not so rich in love as I am, or they are niggards where I am lavish.

O Thou, whose I am, and whose are all my ways! Thou seest me here, the hapless wreck of tides and tempests in my own bosom: do Thou direct to Thyself that ardent love for which I have so often sought a return, in vain, from my fellow-creatures! If Thy goodness has yet such a gift in store for me, as an equal return of affection from her who, Thou knowest, is dearer to me than life, do thou bless and hallow our bond of love and friendship; watch over us in all our outgoings and incomings, for good; and may the tie that unites our hearts be strong and indissoluble, as the thread of man's immortal life!

I am just going to take your Blackbird, the sweetest, I am sure, that ever sung, and prune its wings a little.[2]

SYLVANDER.

No. XVIII.

Thursday Morning [24th Jan. 1788].

Unlavish Wisdom never works in vain.

I have been tasking my reason, Clarinda, why a woman, who, for native genius, poignant wi strength of mind, generous sincerity of soul, and the sweetest female tenderness, is without a peer, and whose personal charms have few, very, very few parallels, among her sex; why, or how she should fall to the blessed

[2] The Blackbird above alluded to is a poem by Clarinda, "the first fruits of her muse" as she calls it, inclosed in a letter of January 19th:—

TO A BLACKBIRD SINGING ON A TREE.

[MORNINGSIDE, 1784.]

Go on, sweet bird, and soothe my care,
Thy cheerful notes will hush despair;
Thy tuneful warblings void of art,
Thrill sweetly through my aching heart.
Now choose thy mate and fondly love,
And all the charming transport prove—
Those sweet emotions all enjoy,
Let Love and Song thy hours employ;
Whilst I, a love-lorn exile, live,
And rapture nor receive nor give,
Go on sweet bird and soothe my care,
Thy cheerful notes will hush despair.

lot of a poor harum-scarum poet, whom Fortune had kept for her particular use, to wreak her temper on whenever she was in ill humour.

One time I conjectured, that as Fortune is the most capricious jade ever known, she may have taken, not a fit of remorse, but a paroxysm of whim, to raise the poor devil out of the mire, where he had so often and so conveniently served her as a stepping-stone, and given him the most glorious boon she ever had in her gift, merely for the maggot's sake, to see how his fool head and his fool heart will bear it.

At other times I was vain enough to think, that Nature, who has a great deal to say with Fortune, had given the coquettish goddess some such hint as, "Here is a paragon of female excellence, whose equal, in all my former compositions, I never was lucky enough to hit on, and despair of ever doing so again; you have cast her rather in the shades of life; there is a certain Poet of my making; among your frolics it would not be amiss to attach him to this masterpiece of my hand, to give her that immortality among mankind, which no woman, of any age, ever more deserved, and which few rhymsters of this age are better able to confer."

Evening, 9 o'clock.

I am here, absolutely unfit to finish my letter—pretty hearty after a bowl, which has been constantly plied since dinner till this moment. I have been with Mr. Schetki, the musician, and he has set the song finely.[1]—I have no distinct ideas of any thing, but that I have drunk your health twice to-night, and that you are all my soul holds dear in this world.

SYLVANDER.

No. XIX.

Friday [25th Jan. 1788].

Clarinda, my life, you have wounded my soul. Can I think of your being unhappy, even though it be not described in your pathetic elegance of language, without being miserable? Clarinda, can I bear to be told from you that "you will not see me to-morrow night—that you wish the hour of parting were come!" Do not let us impose on ourselves by sounds. If, in the moment of fond endearment and tender dalliance, I perhaps trespassed against the *letter* of decorum's law, I appeal even to you, whether I ever sinned, in the very least degree, against the *spirit* of her strictest statute? But why, my love, talk to me in such strong terms, every word of which cuts me to the very soul? You know a hint, the slightest signification of your wish is to me a sacred command.

Be reconciled, my angel, to your God, yourself, and me; and I pledge you Sylvander's honour—an oath, I daresay, you will trust without reserve—that you shall never more have reason to complain of his conduct. Now, my love, do not wound our next meeting with any averted looks or restrained caresses. I have marked the line of conduct—a line, I know, exactly to your taste—and which I will inviolably keep; but do not you show the least inclination to make boundaries. Seeming distrust, where you know you may confide, is a cruel sin against sensibility.

"Delicacy, you know, it was which won me to you at once; take care you do not loosen the dearest, most sacred tie that unites us."—Clarinda, I would not have stung *your* soul, I would not have bruised *your* spirit, as that harsh crucifying "Take care" did mine; no, not to have gained heaven! Let me again appeal to your dear self, if Sylvander, even when he seemingly half-transgressed the laws of decorum, if he did not show more chastened trembling, faltering delicacy, than the many of the world do in keeping these laws?

O Love and Sensibility, ye have conspired against my peace! I love to madness, and I feel to torture! Clarinda, how can I forgive myself that I have ever touched a single chord in your bosom with pain! Would I do it willingly? Would any consideration, any gratification, make me do so? Oh, did you love like me, you would not, you could not, deny or put off a meeting with the man who adores you—who would die a thousand deaths before he would injure you; and who must soon bid you a long farewell!

I had proposed bringing my bosom friend, Mr. Ainslie, to-morrow evening at his strong request to see you; as he has only time to stay with us about ten minutes, for an engagement.

[1] "Clarinda, mistress of my soul." See vol. ii. p. 239.

But I shall hear from you—this afternoon, for Mercy's sake! for till I hear from you, I am wretched. O Clarinda, the tie that binds me to thee is intwisted—incorporated with my dearest threads of life![1]

SYLVANDER.

No. XX.

[Saturday, 26th Jan. 1788.]

I was on the way, *my Love*, to meet you (I never do things by halves) when I got your card. Mr. Ainslie goes out of town to-morrow morning, to see a brother of his who is newly arrived from France. I am determined that he and I shall call on you together: so, look you, lest I should never see to-morrow, we will call on you to-night; Mary[2] and you may put off tea till about seven; at which time, in the Galloway phrase, "an' the beast be to the fore, an' the branks bide hale," expect the humblest of your humble servants, and his dearest friend. We propose staying only half an hour, "for ought we ken." I could suffer the lash of misery eleven months in the year, were the twelfth to be composed of hours like yesternight. You are the soul of my enjoyment: all else is of the stuff of stocks and stones.

SYLVANDER.

[1] This passionate epistle is the reply to a letter of Clarinda's (24th Jan.) referring to the meeting between the lovers on Wednesday the 23d, which Burns had requested in his letter of the 20th. At this meeting it looks as if the communications of the pair had been of a more ardent and unrestrained nature than heretofore, insomuch as to have awakened self-accusing reflections in the bosom of Clarinda. "Her letter," says Chambers, "expresses the distress of a pure-minded, though loving woman, on having been betrayed into an equivocal position." "I am," writes she, "neither well nor happy to-day; my heart reproaches me for last night. If you wish Clarinda to regain her peace, determine against everything but what the strictest delicacy warrants. I do not blame you but myself. . . . Happy Sylvander! that can be attached to Heaven and Clarinda together. Alas! I feel I cannot serve two masters." "Do not be displeased," she continues, "when I tell you I wish our parting was over. At a distance, we shall retain the same heartfelt affection, and interestedness in each other's concerns; but absence will mellow and restrain those violent heart agitations, which, if continued much longer, would unhinge my very soul, and render me unfit for the duties of life." She consented to another meeting, however, which is referred to in Burns's next letter.

[2] Mary Peacock, one of Clarinda's dearest friends. She was afterwards the wife of James Gray, teacher in the Edinburgh High School.

No. XXI.

Sunday noon [27th Jan. 1788].

I have a'most given up the Excise idea. I have been just now to wait on a great person, Miss ——'s friend ——. Why will great people not only deafen us with the din of their equipage, and dazzle us with their fastidious pomp, but they must also be so dictatorially wise? I have been questioned like a child about my matters, and blamed and schooled for my Inscription on Stirling Window. Come, Clarinda! "Come, curse me Jacob; come, defy me Israel!"

Sunday night.

I have been with Miss Nimmo. She is indeed "a good soul," as my Clarinda finely says. She has reconciled me, in a good measure, to the world, with her friendly prattle.

Schetki has sent me the song, set to a fine air of his composing. I have called the song "Clarinda." I have carried it about in my pocket and hummed it over all day.

Monday Morning.

If my prayers have any weight in heaven, this morning looks in on you and finds you in the arms of Peace, except where it is charmingly interrupted by the ardours of Devotion. I find so much serenity of mind, so much positive pleasure, so much fearless daring toward the world, when I warm in devotion, or feel the glorious sensation—a consciousness of Almighty friendship, that I am sure I shall soon be an honest enthusiast.

> How are Thy servants blest, O Lord!
> How sure is their defence!
> Eternal Wisdom is their guide,
> Their help, Omnipotence!

I am, my dear madam, yours,

SYLVANDER.

No. XXII.

Tuesday Morning [29th Jan. 1788].

I cannot go out to-day, my dearest Clarinda, without sending you half a line, by way of a

sin-offering; but, believe me, 'twas the sin of ignorance. Could you think that I *intended* to hurt you by any thing I said yesternight? Nature has been too kind to you for your happiness, your delicacy, your sensibility.—O why should such glorious qualifications be the fruitful source of woe! You have "murdered sleep" to me last night. I went to bed, impressed with an idea that you were unhappy; and every start I closed my eyes, busy Fancy painted you in such scenes of romantic misery, that I would almost be persuaded you were not well this morning.

> If I unwitting have offended,
> Impute it not.
> But while we live,
> But one short hour perhaps, between us two
> Let there be peace.

If Mary is not gone by this reaches you, give her my best compliments. She is a charming girl, and highly worthy of the noblest love.

I send you a poem to read, till I call on you this night, which will be about nine. I wish I could procure some potent spell, some fairy charm, that would protect from injury, or restore to rest, that bosom-chord, "tremblingly alive all o'er," on which hangs your peace of mind. I thought, vainly, I fear, thought that the devotion of love—love strong as even you can feel—love guarded, invulnerably guarded, by all the purity of virtue, and all the pride of honour,—I thought such a love would make you happy. Shall I be mistaken? I can no more for hurry.

SYLVANDER.

No. XXIII.

Friday morning, 7 o'clock, 1st Feb. 1788.

Your fears for Mary are truly laughable.[1] I suppose, my love, you and I showed her a scene, which perhaps made her wish that she had a swain, and one who could love like me; and 'tis a thousand pities that so good a heart as hers should want an aim—an object. I am miserably stupid this morning. Yesterday I dined with a Baronet, and sat pretty late over the bottle. And "who hath woe? who hath sorrow? They that tarry long at the wine; they that go to seek mixed wine." Forgive me, likewise, a quotation from my favourite author. Solomon's knowledge of the world is very great. He may be looked on as the "Spectator" or "Adventurer" of his day: and it is, indeed, surprising what a sameness has ever been in human nature. The broken, but strongly characterizing hints, that the royal author gives us of the manners of the court of Jerusalem, and country of Israel are, in their great outlines, the same pictures that London and England, Versailles and France exhibit some three thousand years later. The loves in the "Song of Songs" are all in the spirit of Lady M. W. Montagu or Madame Ninon de l'Enclos; though for my part I dislike both the ancient and modern voluptuaries; and I will dare to affirm, that such an attachment as mine to Clarinda, and such evenings as she and I have spent, are what these greatly respectable and deeply experienced Judges of Life and Love never dreamt of.

I shall be with you this evening between eight and nine, and shall keep as sober hours as you could wish. I am ever, my dear Madam, yours,

SYLVANDER.

[1] This is in reference to a passage in Clarinda's letter of the preceding day:—"What a cordial evening we had last night! I only tremble at the ardent manner Mary [Peacock] talks of Sylvander! She knows where his affections lie, and is quite unconscious of the eagerness of her expressions. All night I could get no sleep for her admiration. I like her for it, and am proud of it; but I know how much violent admiration is akin to love."

No. XXIV.

Sunday Morning [3d Feb. 1788].

I have just been before the throne of my God, Clarinda; according to my association of ideas, my sentiments of love and friendship, I next devote myself to you. Yesternight I was happy—happiness "that the world cannot give."—I kindle at the recollection; but it is a flame where "Innocence looks smiling on," and Honour stands by a sacred guard.—Your heart, your fondest wishes, your dearest thoughts, these are yours to bestow: your person is unapproachable by the laws of your country; and he loves not as I do, who would make you miserable.

You are an angel, Clarinda; you are surely no mortal that "the earth owns."—To kiss your hand, to live on your smile, is to me far more exquisite bliss, than the dearest favours that the fairest of the sex, yourself excepted, can bestow.

Sunday Evening.

You are the constant companion of my thoughts. How wretched is the condition of one who is haunted with conscious guilt, and trembling under the idea of dreaded vengeance! and what a placid calm, what a charming secret enjoyment is given to one's bosom by the kind feelings of friendship, and the fond throes of love! Out upon the tempest of Anger, the acrimonious gall of fretful Impatience, the sullen frost of louring Resentment, or the corroding poison of withered Envy! They eat up the immortal part of man! If they spent their fury only on the unfortunate objects of them, it would be something in their favour; but these miserable passions, like traitor Iscariot, betray their lord and master.

Thou Almighty Author of peace, and goodness, and love! do thou give me the social heart that kindly tastes of every man's cup! Is it a draught of joy?—warm and open my heart to share it with cordial unenvying rejoicing! Is it the bitter potion of sorrow?—melt my heart with sincerely sympathetic woe! Above all, do thou give me the manly mind, that resolutely exemplifies, in life and manners, those sentiments which I would wish to be thought to possess! The friend of my soul—there, may I never deviate from the firmest fidelity and most active kindness! Clarinda, the dear object of my fondest love; there, may the most sacred inviolate honour, the most faithful kindling constancy, ever watch and animate my every thought and imagination!

Did you ever meet with the following lines spoken of Religion, your darling topic?

'Tis *this*, my friend! that streaks our morning bright;
'Tis *this* that gilds the horrors of our night;
When wealth forsakes us, and when friends are few,
When friends are faithless, or when foes pursue;
'Tis this that wards the blow, or stills the smart,
Disarms affliction, or repels its dart;
Within the breast bids purest rapture rise,
Bids smiling Conscience spread her cloudless skies.

I met with these verses very early in life, and was so delighted with them, that I have them by me, copied at school.

Good night and sound rest, my dearest Clarinda!

SYLVANDER.

No. XXV.

Thursday night [7th Feb. 1788].

I cannot be easy, my Clarinda, while any sentiment respecting me in your bosom gives you pain. If there is no man on earth to whom your heart and affections are justly due, it may savour of imprudence, but never of criminality, to bestow that heart and those affections where you please. The God of love meant and made those delicious attachments to be bestowed on somebody; and even all the imprudence lies in bestowing them on an unworthy object. If this reasoning is conclusive, as it certainly is, I must be allowed to "talk of Love."[1]

It is, perhaps, rather wrong to speak highly to a friend of his letter; it is apt to lay one under a little restraint in their future letters, and restraint is the death of a friendly epistle; but there is one passage in your last charming letter, Thomson nor Shenstone never exceeded it, nor often came up to it. I shall certainly steal it, and set it in some future poetic production, and get immortal fame by it. 'Tis when you bid the scenes of nature remind me of Clarinda.[2] Can I forget you, Clarinda? I would detest myself as a tasteless, unfeeling,

[1] In her letter of Wednesday, to which the above forms a reply, Clarinda says:—"There is not a sentiment in your last dear letter but must meet the approbation of every worthy discerning mind—except one, 'that my heart, my fondest wishes are mine to bestow.' True, they are not, they cannot be, placed upon him who ought to have had them, but whose conduct (I dare say no more against him) has justly forfeited them. But is it not too near an infringement of the sacred obligations of marriage to bestow one's heart, wishes, and thoughts upon another? Something in my soul whispers that it approaches criminality."

[2] "Sylvander, I believe our friendship will be lasting; its basis has been virtue, similarity of tastes, feelings and sentiments. Alas! I shudder at the idea of one hundred miles distance. You'll hardly write me once a month, and other objects will weaken your affection for Clarinda! Yet I cannot believe so. Oh, let the scenes of nature remind you of Clarinda! In Winter, remember the dark shades of

insipid, infamous blockhead! I have loved women of ordinary merit, whom I could have loved for ever. You are the first, the only unexceptionable individual of the beauteous sex that I ever met with; and never woman more entirely possessed my soul. I know myself, and how far I can depend on passions, well. It has been my peculiar study.

I thank you for going to Miers.[1] Urge him, for necessity calls to have it done by the middle of next week: Wednesday the latest day. I want it for a breast-pin to wear next my heart. I propose to keep sacred set times, to wander in the woods and wilds for meditation on you. Then, and only then, your lovely image shall be produced to the day with a reverence akin to devotion.

. . . . . .

To-morrow night shall not be the last. Good night! I am perfectly stupid, as I supped late yesternight.

SYLVANDER.

No. XXVI.

[Wednesday, 13th Feb. 1788.]

MY EVER DEAREST CLARINDA,

I make a numerous dinner party wait me while I read yours, and write this. Do not require that I should cease to love you, to adore you in my soul—'tis to me impossible. Your peace and happiness are to me dearer than my soul; name the terms on which you wish to see me, to correspond with me, and you have them. I must love, pine, mourn, and adore in secret—this you must not deny me. You will ever be to me

> Dear as the light that visits these sad eyes,
> Dear as the ruddy drops that warm my heart![2]

I have not patience to read the Puritanic scrawl.—Damned sophistry!—Ye heavens! thou God of nature! thou Redeemer of mankind! ye look down with approving eyes on a passion inspired by the purest flame, and guarded by truth, delicacy, and honour; but the half-inch soul of an unfeeling, cold-blooded, pitiful presbyterian bigot, cannot forgive any thing above his dungeon bosom and foggy head.[3]

Farewell! I'll be with you to-morrow evening—and be at rest in your mind—I will be yours in the way you think most to your happiness! I dare not proceed——I love, and will love you, and will with joyous confidence approach the throne of the almighty Judge of men, with your dear idea, and will despise the scum of sentiment, and the mist of sophistry.

SYLVANDER.

No. XXVII.

Wednesday, Midnight, 13th Feb. 1788.

After a wretched day I am preparing for a sleepless night. I am going to address myself to the Almighty Witness of my actions—sometime, perhaps very soon, my Almighty Judge. I am not going to be the advocate of Passion; be Thou my inspirer and testimony, O God, as I plead the cause of truth!

her fate; in Summer, the warmth, the cordial warmth of her friendship; in Autumn, her glowing wishes to bestow plenty on all; and let Spring animate you with hopes, that your friend may live to surmount the wintry blasts of life, and revive to taste a spring-time of happiness. At all events, Sylvander, the storms of life 'will quickly pass, and one unbounded Spring encircle all.' There, Sylvander, I trust we'll meet. Love *there* is not a crime. I charge you to meet me there."

[1] Miers was an Edinburgh artist of some skill in the execution of silhouettes, and it was to procure a portrait of herself in this style for the poet that she went there. These portraits the artist professed to produce at a two minutes' sitting, and, according to a newspaper advertisement of the time, his charge for them, including frames, was from six shillings to half a guinea. Some months previous to this Miers had executed several portraits of Burns himself, one of which the poet sent to William Tytler of Woodhouselee, along with a poem. See vol. ii. p. 210.

[2] From Gray's "Bard."

[3] A number of Clarinda's letters to Sylvander written about this time have been lost. But the fears of the lady for the remarks of friends and neighbours respecting her connection with the poet had at length been realized. It appears from one of her letters that she had, on the 27th of January, confessed to her pastor, the Rev. John Kemp of Tolbooth parish church, that she "had conceived a tender impression of late, that it was mutual and that I had wished to unbosom myself to him. . . . I saw he felt for me (for I was in tears); but he bewailed that I had given my *heart* while in my present state of bondage—wished I had made it friendship *only*—in short, talked to me in the style of a tender Parent, *anxious* for my happiness." This reverend gentleman, perhaps getting alarmed at the growing intimacy between the parties, may have written Clarinda the "Puritanic scrawl" and the "haughty dictatorial letter" referred to in the above and the succeeding epistles.

I have read over your friend's haughty dictatorial letter; you are only answerable to God in such a matter. Who gave any fellow-creature of yours (a fellow-creature incapable of being your judge, because not your peer) a right to catechise, scold, undervalue, abuse, and insult, wantonly and unhumanly to insult you thus? I don't wish, not even *wish*, to deceive you, Madam. The Searcher of hearts is my witness how dear you are to me; but though it were possible you could be still dearer to me, I would not even kiss your hand at the expense of your conscience. Away with declamation! let us appeal to the bar of common sense. It is not mouthing everything sacred; it is not vague ranting assertions; it is not assuming, haughtily and insultingly assuming, the dictatorial language of a Roman Pontiff, that must dissolve a union like ours. Tell me, Madam, are you under the least shadow of an obligation to bestow your love, tenderness, caresses, affections, heart and soul, on Mr. M'Lehose—the man who has repeatedly, habitually, and barbarously broken through every tie of duty, nature, or gratitude to you? The laws of your country, indeed, for the most useful reasons of policy and sound government, have made your person inviolate; but are your heart and affections bound to one who gives not the least return of either to you? You cannot do it; it is not in the nature of things that you are bound to do it; the common feelings of humanity forbid it. Have you, then, a heart and affections which are no man's right? You have. It would be highly, ridiculously absurd to suppose the contrary. Tell me, then, in the name of common sense, can it be wrong, is such a supposition compatible with the plainest ideas of right and wrong, that it is improper to bestow the heart and those affections on another—while that bestowing is not the smallest degree hurtful to your duty to God, to your children, to yourself, or to society at large?

This is the great test: the consequences; let us see them. In a widowed, forlorn, lonely situation, with a bosom glowing with love and tenderness, yet so delicately situated that you cannot indulge these nobler feelings except you meet with a man who has a soul capable of . . . . . .

SYLVANDER.

No. XXVIII.

Thursday [14th Feb. 1788].

"I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan!" I have suffered, Clarinda, from your letter. My soul was in arms at the sad perusal; I dreaded that I had acted wrong. If I have robbed you of a friend, God forgive me! But, Clarinda, be comforted: let us raise the tone of our feelings a little higher and bolder. A fellow-creature who leaves us, who spurns us without just cause, though once our bosom friend—up with a little honest pride—let them go! How shall I comfort you, who am the cause of the injury? Can I wish that I had never seen you? that we had never met? No! I never will. But have I thrown you friendless?—there is almost distraction in the thought. Father of mercies! against Thee often have I sinned: through Thy grace I will endeavour to do so no more! She who, Thou knowest, is dearer to me than myself, pour Thou the balm of peace into her past wounds, and hedge her about with Thy peculiar care, all her future days and nights! Strengthen her tender noble mind, firmly to suffer, and magnanimously to bear! Make me worthy of that friendship she honours me with. May my attachment to her be pure as devotion, and lasting as immortal life! O Almighty Goodness, hear me! Be to her at all times, particularly in the hour of distress or trial, a Friend and Comforter, a Guide and Guard.

> How are Thy servants blest, O Lord!
> How sure is their defence!
> Eternal Wisdom is their guide,
> Their help, Omnipotence!

Forgive me, Clarinda, the injury I have done you! To-night I shall be with you; as indeed I shall be ill at ease till I see you.

SYLVANDER.

No. XXIX.

Two o'clock.

I just now received your first letter of yesterday, by the careless negligence of the penny-post. Clarinda, matters are grown very serious with us; then seriously hear me, and hear me, Heaven!

I met you, my dear Clarinda, by far the first of woman-kind, at least to me. I esteemed, I loved you at first sight, both of which attachments you have done me the honour to return. The longer I am acquainted with you, the more innate amiableness and worth I discover in you. You have suffered a loss,[1] I confess, for my sake: but if the firmest, steadiest, warmest friendship; if every endeavour to be worthy of your friendship; if a love, strong as the ties of nature, and holy as the duties of religion—if all these can make any thing like a compensation for the evil I have occasioned you, if they be worth your acceptance, or can in the least add to your enjoyments——So help Sylvander, ye Powers above, in his hour of need, as he freely gives these all to Clarinda!

I esteem you, I love you as a friend; I admire you, I love you as a woman, beyond any one in all the circle of creation; I know I shall continue to esteem you, to love you, to pray for you, n..y, to pray for myself for your sake.

Expect me at eight—And believe me to be ever, my dearest Madam, yours most entirely,

SYLVANDER.

No. XXX.

[Friday, 15th Feb. 1788.]

When matters, my love, are desperate, we must put on a desperate face—

On reason build resolve,
That column of true majesty in man.

Or, as the same author finely says in another place,—

Let thy soul spring up,
And lay strong hold for help on Him that made thee.

I am yours, Clarinda, for life. Never be discouraged at all this. Look forward; in a few weeks I shall be somewhere or other out of the possibility of seeing you: till then, I shall write you often, but visit you seldom. Your fame, your welfare, your happiness, are dearer to me than any gratification whatever. Be comforted, my love! the present moment is the worst: the lenient hand of Time is daily and hourly either lightening the burden, or making us insensible to the weight. None of these friends, I mean Mr. —— and the other gentleman, can hurt your worldly support, and for their friendship, in a little time you will learn to be easy, and, by and by, to be happy without it. A decent means of livelihood in the world, an approving God, a peaceful conscience, and one firm trusty friend—can any body that has these be said to be unhappy? These are yours.

To-morrow evening I shall be with you about eight; probably for the last time till I return to Edinburgh. In the meantime, should any of these two *unlucky* friends question you respecting me, whether I am *the Man*, I do not think they are entitled to any information. As to their jealousy and spying, I despise them.

Adieu, my dearest Madam!

SYLVANDER.

No. XXXI.

GLASGOW,[2] Monday Evening, 9 o'clock
[18th Feb. 1788].

The attraction of Love, I find, is in an inverse proportion to the attraction of the Newtonian Philosophy. In the system of Sir Isaac, the nearer objects are to one another, the stronger is the attractive force: in my system, every mile-stone that marked my progress from Clarinda, awakened a keener pang of attachment to her. How do you feel, my love? Is your heart ill at ease? I fear it. God forbid that these persecutors should harass that peace, which is more precious to me than my own. Be assured I shall ever think of you, muse on you, and in my moments of devotion, pray for you. The hour that you are not in all my thoughts—"be that hour darkness! let the shadows of death cover it! let it not be numbered in the hours of the day!"

When I forget the darling theme,
Be my tongue mute! my fancy paint no more!
And dead to joy, forget my heart to beat!

I have just met with my old friend, the ship captain![3] guess my pleasure—To meet

[1] The loss of some friend, or friends, no doubt, who had become estranged from her on account of her increasing—and, as they would consider, imprudent if not culpable—intimacy with the poet.

[2] Burns was now on his way from Edinburgh to Ayrshire.

[3] His Irvine friend, Richard Brown. See Life and General Correspondence.

you could alone have given me more. My brother William, too, the young saddler, has come to Glasgow to meet me; and here are we three spending the evening.

I arrived here too late to write by post; but I'll wrap half a dozen sheets of blank paper together, and send it by the fly, under the name of a parcel. You shall hear from me next post town. I would write you a long letter, but for the present circumstances of my friend.

Adieu, my Clarinda! I am just going to propose your health by way of grace-drink.

SYLVANDER.

No. XXXII.

KILMARNOCK, Friday [22d Feb. 1788].

I wrote you, my dear Madam, the moment I alighted in Glasgow. Since then I have not had opportunity; for in Paisley, where I arrived next day, my worthy, wise friend, Mr. Pattison, did not allow me a moment's respite. I was there ten hours; during which time I was introduced to nine men worth six thousands; five men worth ten thousands; his brother, richly worth twenty thousands; and a young weaver, who will have thirty thousands good, when his father, who has no more children than the said weaver, and a Whig kirk, dies. Mr. P. was bred a zealous Anti-burgher; but during his widowerhood, he has found their strictness incompatible with certain compromises he is often obliged to make with those Powers of darkness—the devil, the world, and the flesh: so he, good, merciful man! talked privately to me of the absurdity of eternal torments; the liberality of sentiment in indulging the honest instincts of nature; the mysteries of . . . &c. He has a son, however, that, at sixteen, has repeatedly minted at certain privileges only proper for sober, staid men, who can use the good things of this life without abusing them; but the father's parental vigilance has hitherto hedged him in, amid a corrupt and evil world.

His only daughter, who, "if the beast be to the fore, and the branks bide hale," will have seven thousand pounds when her old father steps into the dark Factory-office of Eternity with his well-thumbed web of life, has put him again and again in a commendable fit of indignation, by requesting a harpsichord. "O! these boarding schools!" exclaims my prudent friend. "She was a good spinner and sewer, till I was advised by her foes and mine to give her a year of Edinburgh!"

After two bottles more, my much-respected friend opened up to me a project, a legitimate child of Wisdom and Good Sense; 'twas no less than a long-thought-on, and deeply-matured design to marry a girl, fully as elegant in her form as the famous priestess whom Saul consulted in his last hours, and who had been the second maid of honour to his deceased wife. This, you may be sure, I highly applauded, so I hope for a pair of gloves by and by.[1]

I spent the two bypast days at Dunlop House with that worthy family to whom I was deeply indebted early in my poetic career; and in about two hours I shall present your "twa wee sarkies" to the little fellow.[2] My dearest Clarinda, you are ever present with me; and these hours that drawl by among the fools and rascals of this world, are only supportable in the idea, that they are the forerunners of that happy hour that ushers me to "the mistress of my soul." Next week I shall visit Dumfries, and next again return to Edinburgh. My letters in these hurrying dissipated hours, will be heavy trash; but you know the writer. God bless you.

SYLVANDER.

No. XXXIII.

[MOSSGIEL, Saturday, 23d Feb. 1788.]

I have just now, my ever dear Madam, delivered your kind present to my sweet little Bobbie, whom I find a very fine fellow. Your letter was waiting me. Your interview with

[1] Clarinda's remarks on Burns's host on this occasion are both characteristic and interesting:—"In the name of wonder how could you spend ten hours with such a heathen as Mr. Pattison? What a despicable character! Religion! he knows only the name; none of her real votaries ever wished to make any such shameful compromises. But 'tis Scripture verified: the demon of avarice, his original devil, finding him empty called in other seven impure spirits, and so completely infernalized him."

[2] Two small shirts for his son Robert, at Mossgiel with Gilbert Burns and the poet's mother. See next letter.

Mr. Kemp opens a wound, ill-closed, in my breast; not that I think his friendship is of so much consequence to you, but because you set such a value on it.

Now for a little news that will please you. I, this morning, as I came home, called for a certain woman.[1]—I am disgusted with her—I cannot endure her! I, while my heart smote me for the profanity, tried to compare her with my Clarinda; 'twas setting the expiring glimmer of a farthing taper beside the cloudless glory of the meridian sun. *Here* was tasteless insipidity, vulgarity of soul, and mercenary fawning; *there* polished good-sense, Heaven-born genius, and the most generous, the most delicate, the most tender passion. I have done with her, and she with me.

I set off to-morrow for Dumfries-shire. 'Tis merely out of compliment to Mr. Miller;[2] for I know the Indies must be my lot. I will write to you from Dumfries, if these horrid postages don't frighten me.

> Whatever place, whatever land I see,
> My heart, untravelled, fondly turns to thee;
> Still to "Clarinda" turns with ceaseless pain,
> And drags at each remove a lengthened chain.

I just stay to write you a few lines, before I go to call on my friend, Mr. Gavin Hamilton. I hate myself as an unworthy sinner, because those interviews of old dear friends make me, for half a moment, almost forget Clarinda.

Remember to-morrow evening, at eight o'clock, I shall be with the Father of Mercies, at that hour on your own account. Farewell! If the post goes not to-night, I'll finish the other page to-morrow morning.

SYLVANDER.

P.S. Remember.

No. XXXIV.

CUMNOCK, 2d March, 1788.

I hope, and am certain, that my generous Clarinda will not think my silence, for now a long week, has been in any degree owing to my forgetfulness. I have been tossed about through the country ever since I wrote you: and am here, returning from Dumfries-shire, at an inn, the post-office of the place, with just so long time as my horse eats its corn, to write you. I have been hurried with business and dissipation almost equal to the insidious import of the Persian monarch's mandate, when he forbade asking petition of God or man for forty days. Had the venerable prophet been as throng as I, he had not broken the decree, at least not thrice a-day.

I am thinking my farming scheme will yet hold. A worthy intelligent farmer, my father's friend and my own, has been with me on the spot: he thinks the bargain practicable. I am myself, on a more serious review of the lands, much better pleased with them. I won't mention this in writing to anybody but you and Mr. Ainslie. Don't accuse me of being fickle: I have the two plans of life before me, and I wish to adopt the one most likely to procure me independence.

I shall be in Edinburgh next week. I long to see you: your image is omnipresent to me; nay, I am convinced I would soon idolatrize it most seriously; so much do absence and memory improve the medium through which one sees the much-loved object. To night, at the sacred hour of eight, I expect to meet you at the Throne of Grace. I hope as I go home to night, to find a letter from you at the post office in Mauchline. I have just once seen that dear hand since I left Edinburgh—a letter indeed which much affected me. Tell me, first of womankind! will my warmest attach-

[1] The "certain woman" was his "Jean," who at this time was expecting to bring into the world within a week or two the fruits of her renewed intimacy with Burns, and who, some eight or ten weeks later, became the poet's wife and the inspirer of "O'a' the airts the wind can blaw." Burns does not appear in a very pleasant light here. Surely, notwithstanding the glamour of his sentimental, pseudo-platonic, semi-religious love-making with Clarinda, he might have felt a little more tenderness towards the poor young woman in her present unhappy condition, and might at least have refrained from writing disparagingly of her to Clarinda. His communication, whether it "pleased" the latter or not, probably did not much displease her. In a letter written on March 5th she says:—"I hope you have not forgotten to kiss the little cherub [that is, Robert, junior] for me. Give him fifty, and think Clarinda blessing him all the while. I pity his mother sincerely, and wish *a certain affair* happily over." The "certain affair" resulted in the birth of twin daughters, who both died in a few days. The Clarinda Correspondence occasionally has a somewhat nauseous flavour. Compare also letter to Ainslie of 3d March 1788, and letter to Richard Brown of 7th March.

[2] Patrick Miller, Esq., of Dalswinton, with whom the poet was negotiating for the lease of a farm.

ment, my sincerest friendship, my correspondence—will they be any compensation for the sacrifices you make for my sake? If they will, they are yours. If I settle on the farm I propose, I am just a day and a half's ride from Edinburgh.[1] We shall meet—don't you say, "perhaps too often!"

Farewell, my fair, my charming poetess! May all good things ever attend you!

I am ever, my dearest Madam, yours,

SYLVANDER.

No. XXXV.

[MAUCHLINE, 6th March, 1788.]

I own myself guilty, Clarinda; I should have written you last week; but when you recollect, my dearest Madam, that yours of this night's post is only the third I have got from you, and that this is the fifth or sixth I have sent to you, you will not reproach me, with a good grace, for unkindness.[2] I have always some kind of idea, not to sit down to write a letter, except I have time and possession of my faculties so as to do some justice to my letter; which at present is rarely my situation. For instance, yesterday I dined at a friend's at some distance; the savage hospitality of this country spent me the most part of the night over the nauseous potion in the bowl: this day—sick—head-ache—low spirits—miserable—fasting, except for a draught of water or small beer; now eight o'clock at night—only able to crawl ten minutes' walk into Mauchline to wait the post, in the pleasurable hope of hearing from the mistress of my soul.

But, truce with all this! When I sit down to write to you, all is harmony and peace. A hundred times a-day do I figure you, before your taper, your book, or work laid aside, as I get within the room. How happy have I been! and how little of that scantling portion of time, called the life of man, is sacred to happiness, much less transport.

I could moralize to-night like a death's head.

> O what is life, that thoughtless wish of all!
> A drop of honey in a draught of gall.

Nothing astonishes me more, when a little sickness clogs the wheels of life, than the thoughtless career we run in the hour of health. "None saith, Where is God, my Maker, that giveth songs in the night: who teacheth us more knowledge than the beasts of the field, and more understanding than the fowls of the air?"

Give me, my Maker, to remember thee! Give me to act up to the dignity of my nature! Give me to feel "another's woe;" and continue with me that dear-lov'd friend that feels with mine!

The dignified and dignifying consciousness of an honest man, and the well-grounded trust in approving Heaven, are two most substantial sources of happiness.

. . . . . .

I could not have written a page to any mortal except yourself. I'll write to you by Sunday's post. Adieu. Good night.

SYLVANDER.

No. XXXVI.

MOSSGIEL, 7th March, 1788.

Clarinda, I have been so stung with your reproach for unkindness, a sin so unlike me, a sin I detest more than a breach of the whole Decalogue, fifth, sixth, seventh, and ninth articles excepted, that I believe I shall not rest in my grave about it, if I die before I see you. You have often allowed me the head to judge, and the heart to feel, the influence of female excellence. Was it not blasphemy, then, against your own charms, and against my feelings, to suppose that a short fortnight could abate my passion? You, my love, may have your cares and anxieties to disturb you, but they are the usual recurrences of life; your future views are fixed, and your mind in

[1] The distance is a little over 70 miles, and was then traversed by the Edinburgh and Dumfries road, one of the best and most frequented highways in the country.

[2] Clarinda had written him on the 5th:—"I fear, Sylvander, you over-value my generosity [see the first sentence of letter xxxiv.]; for believe me it will be some time before I can cordially forgive you the pain your silence has caused me. Did you ever feel that sickness of heart which arises from 'hope deferred?' That—the cruellest of pains—you have inflicted on me for eight days by-past. I can make every reasonable allowance for the hurry of business and dissipation. Yet had I been ever so engrossed, I should have found one hour out of the twenty-four to write to you."

a settled routine. Could not you, my ever dearest Madam, make a little allowance for a man, after a long absence, paying a short visit to a country full of friends, relations, and early intimates? Cannot you guess, my Clarinda, what thoughts, what cares, what anxious forebodings, hopes, and fears, must crowd the breast of the man of keen sensibility, when no less is on the tapis than his aim, his employment, his very existence, through future life?

To be overtopped in anything else, I can bear; but in the lists of generous love, I defy all mankind! not even the tender, the fond, the loving Clarinda! she whose strength of attachment, whose melting soul, may vie with Eloise and Sappho, not even she can overpay me the affection she owes me!

Now that, not my apology, but my defence, is made, I feel my soul respire more easily. I know you will go along with me in my justification—would to heaven you could in my adoption too!—I mean an adoption beneath the stars—an adoption where I might revel in the immediate beams of her

the bright sun of all her sex.

I would not have you, my dear Madam, so much hurt at Miss Nimmo's coldness.[1] 'Tis placing yourself below her, an honour she by no means deserves. We ought, when we wish to be economists in happiness—we ought, in the first place, to fix the standard of our own character; and when, on full examination, we know where we stand, and how much ground we occupy, let us contend for it as property; and those who seem to doubt, or deny us what is justly ours, let us either pity their prejudices, or despise their judgment. I know, my dear, you will say this is self-conceit: but I call it self-knowledge. The one is the overweening opinion of a fool, who fancies himself to be what he wishes himself to be thought; the other is the honest justice that a man of sense, who has thoroughly examined the subject, owes to himself. Without this standard, this column in our own mind, we are perpetually at the mercy of the petulance, the mistakes, the prejudices, nay, the very weakness and wickedness of our fellow-creatures.

I urge this, my dear, both to confirm myself in the doctrine, which, I assure you, I sometimes need; and because I know that this causes you often much disquiet.—To return to Miss Nimmo: she is most certainly a worthy soul, and equalled by very, very few, in goodness of heart. But can she boast more goodness of heart than Clarinda? Not even prejudice will dare to say so. For penetration and discernment, Clarinda sees far beyond her. To wit, Miss Nimmo dare make no pretence; to Clarinda's wit, scarcely any of her sex dare make pretence. Personal charms—it would be ridiculous to run the parallel: and for conduct in life, Miss Nimmo was never called out, either much to do or to suffer; Clarinda has been both; and has performed her part, where Miss Nimmo would have sunk at the bare idea.

Away, then, with these disquietudes! Let us pray with the honest weaver of Kilbarchan —"Lord, send us a guid conceit o' oursel'!" Or, in the words of the auld sang,

Who does me disdain, I scorn them again,
And I'll never mind any such foes.

There is an error in the commerce of intimacy which has led me far astray[2] . . . . . those who, by way of exchange, have not an equivalent to give us; and, what is still worse, have no idea of the value of our goods. Happy is our lot indeed, when we meet with an honest merchant, who is qualified to deal with us on our own terms; but that is a rarity. With almost every body we must pocket our pearls, less or more, and learn, in the old Scotch phrase—"To gie sic like as we get." For this reason one should try to erect a kind of bank or storehouse in one's own mind; or, as the Psalmist says, "We should commune with our own hearts and be still." This is exactly . . . . . if the friend be so particularly favoured of Heaven as to have a soul so noble and exalted as yours, sooner or later your bosom will ache with disappointment.

[1] This alludes to the following passage in Clarinda's letter of the 5th:—"I never see Miss Nimmo. Her indifference wounds me; but all these things make me fly to the Father of Mercies, who is the inexhaustible Fountain of all kindness." Miss Nimmo had taken alarm apparently at Clarinda's increasing intimacy with Sylvander.

[2] Here the MS. has become much tattered, and it is only possible to fill in the gaps by the merest conjecture.

I wrote you yesternight, which will reach you long before this can. I may write Mr. Ainslie before I see him, but I am not sure. Farewell! and remember

SYLVANDER.

No. XXXVII.

EDINBURGH,
Monday noon [17th March, 1788].

I will meet you to-morrow, Clarinda, as you appoint. My Excise affair is just concluded, and I have got my order for instructions: so far good.[1] Wednesday night I am engaged to sup among some of the principals of the Excise; so can only make a call for you that evening; but next day I stay to dine with one of the Commissioners, so cannot go till Friday morning.

Your hopes, your fears, your cares, my love, are mine; so don't mind them. I will take you in my hand through the dreary wilds of this world, and scare away the ravening bird or beast that would annoy you. I saw Mary in town to-day, and asked her if she had seen you. I shall certainly bespeak Mr. Ainslie as you desire.

Excuse me, my dearest angel, this hurried scrawl and miserable paper, circumstances make both. Farewell till to-morrow.

SYLVANDER.

No. XXXVIII.

[EDINBURGH,
Tuesday Morning, 18th March, 1788.]

I am just hurrying away to wait on the Great Man, C'arinda; but I have more respect to my own peace and happiness than to set out without waiting on you; for my imagination, like a child's favourite bird, will fondly flutter along with this scrawl, till it perch on your bosom. I thank you for all the happiness bestowed on me yesterday. The walk—delightful; the evening—rapture. Do not be uneasy to-day, Clarinda; forgive me. I am in rather better spirits to-day, though I had but an indifferent night. Care, anxiety, sat on my spirits; and all the cheerfulness of this morning is the fruit of some important ideas that lie, in their realities, beyond "the dark and narrow house" as Ossian, prince of poets, says. The Father of Mercies be with you, Clarinda! and every good thing attend you!

SYLVANDER.

No. XXXIX.

Wednesday morning [19th March, 1788].

Clarinda, will that envious night-cap hinder you from appearing at the window as I pass?[2] "Who is she that looketh forth as the morning; fair as the sun, clear as the moon, terrible as an army with banners?"

Do not accuse me of fond folly for this line; you know I am a cool lover. I mean by these presents greeting, to let you to wit, that arch-rasc— Cr—ch has not done my business yesternight, which has put off my leaving town till Monday morning.[3] To-morrow, at eleven, I meet with him for the last time; just the hour I should have met far more agreeable company.

[1] According to a letter to Robert Muir of 7th March, Burns intended to leave Mossgiel for Edinburgh on Monday the 10th, reaching Glasgow the first night. He concluded his bargain for the farm of Ellisland on the 13th, as we learn from a letter to Miss Chalmers, dated Edinburgh, 14th, and on the 17th he was finally accepted as an officer in the Excise. From (say) the 12th till the 17th (the date of the above letter) he had no doubt been meeting his Clarinda; how often it is now impossible to tell; but it seems from the tone of the succeeding letters, that he had contrived to allay the lady's fears for the censure of her friends.

[2] At this date Clarinda lived in a small flat or floor of a house situated, as Chambers says, over an alley, called General's Entry, in consequence, it is said, of General Monk having lived there when in command in Scotland. The house, accessible by a winding back-stair, was very humble in its accommodation, and was latterly occupied by poor people. Alison's Square, where Miss Nimmo (the wearer of "that envious night-cap") lived, was right opposite, and we can readily see how Clarinda would feel the necessity of being cautious about the frequency of Burns's visits. General's Entry and Alison Square have now been swept away by the march of city improvement, Marshall Street, running between Nicholson Square and Bristo Street, occupying their site.

[3] William Creech, the publisher of the Edinburgh edition of the poet's works, and whom Burns thought unreasonably postponed settling accounts with him. (See the *Life*.) The poet's truculent letter to his publisher has never seen the light.

You will tell me this evening, whether you cannot make our hour of meeting to-morrow one o'clock. I have just now written Creech such a letter, that the very goose-feather in my hand shrunk back from the line, and seemed to say, "I exceedingly fear and quake." I am forming ideal schemes of vengeance. O for a little of my will on him! I just wished he loved as I do—as glorious an object as Clarinda—and that he were doomed.—Adieu, and think on

SYLVANDER.

No. XL.

Friday, nine o'clock, Night [31st March, 1788].

I am just now come in, and have read your letter. The first thing I did was to thank the Divine Disposer of events, that he has had such happiness in store for me as the connexion I have with you. Life, my Clarinda, is a weary, barren path; and woe be to him or her that ventures on it alone! For me, I have my dearest partner of my soul: Clarinda and I will make our pilgrimage together. Wherever I am I shall constantly let her know how I go on, what I observe in the world around me, and what adventures I meet with. Will it please you, my love, to get, every week, or at least, every fortnight, a packet, two or three sheets, full of remarks, nonsense, news, rhymes, and old songs?

Will you open with satisfaction and delight, a letter from a man who loves you, who has loved you, and who will love you to death, through death, and for ever? Oh Clarinda! what do I owe to Heaven for blessing me with such a piece of exalted excellence as you! I call over your idea, as a miser counts over his treasure! Tell me, were you studious to please me last night? I am sure you did it to transport. How rich am I who have such a treasure as you! You know me; you know how to make me happy, and you do it most effectually. God bless you with

Long life, long youth, long pleasure, and a friend!

To-morrow night, according to your own direction, I shall watch the window; 'tis the star that guides me to Paradise. The great relish to all is—that Honour—that Innocence—that Religion, are the witnesses and guarantees of our happiness. "The Lord God knoweth," and perhaps "Israel, he shall know" my love and your merit. Adieu, Clarinda! I am going to remember you in my prayers.

SYLVANDER.

[The above is the last of the amatory epistles of Sylvander to Clarinda. The sentimental pair, it is to be inferred from this letter, held their parting meeting on Saturday the 22d; on Monday the poet left Edinburgh; some time in April, probably towards the end of it, he "privately gave" his Jean "a matrimonial title to his corpus." The first of the following series is an answer to a hotly indignant letter (now lost), written by the lady nearly a year after their separation.]

No. XLI.

TO MRS. M'LEHOSE.

ELLISLAND, March 9th, 1789.

Madam,

The letter you wrote me to Heron's carried its own answer in its bosom; you forbade me to write you, unless I was willing to plead guilty to a certain indictment that you were pleased to bring against me. As I am convinced of my own innocence, and, though conscious of high imprudence and egregious folly, can lay my hand upon my breast, and attest the rectitude of my heart, you will pardon me, Madam, if I do not carry my complaisance so far as humbly to acquiesce in the name of "Villain," merely out of compliment to your opinion, much as I esteem your judgment, and warmly as I regard your worth.

I have already told you, and I again aver it, that, at the time alluded to, I was not under the smallest mortal tie to Mrs. Burns; nor did I, nor could I then know all the powerful circumstances that omnipotent necessity was busy laying in wait for me. When you call over the scenes that have passed between us, you will survey the conduct of an honest man struggling successfully with temptations, the most powerful that ever beset humanity, and preserving untainted honour in situations where the austerest virtue would have forgiven a fall; situations that, I will dare to say, not a single individual of his kind, even with half

his sensibility and passion, could have encountered without ruin; and I leave you to guess, Madam, how such a man is likely to digest an accusation of "perfidious treachery."

Was I to blame, Madam, in being the distracted victim of charms which, I affirm, no man ever approached with impunity? Had I seen the least glimmering of hope that these charms could ever have been mine; or even had not iron Necessity—But these are unavailing words.

I would have called on you when I was in town, indeed I could not have resisted it, but that Mr. Ainslie told me you were determined to avoid your windows while I was in town, lest even a glance of me should occur in the street.

When I shall have regained your good opinion, perhaps I may venture to solicit your friendship; but, be that as it may, the first of her sex I ever knew shall always be the object of my warmest good wishes.

ROBT. BURNS.

No. XLII.

[ELLISLAND, February, 1790.]

I have indeed been ill, Madam, the whole winter. An incessant headache, depression of spirits, and all the truly miserable consequences of a deranged nervous system, have made dreadful havoc of my health and peace. Add to all this, a line of life into which I have lately entered obliges me to ride, upon an average, at least two hundred miles every week. However, thank Heaven, I am now greatly better in health. . . .

I could not answer your last letter but one. When you in so many words tell a man that you look on his letters with a smile of contempt, in what language, Madam, can he answer you? Though I were conscious that I had acted wrong—and I am conscious I have acted wrong—yet would I not be bullied into repentance.

I cannot, will not, enter into extenuatory circumstances; else I could show you how my precipitate, headlong, unthinking conduct, leagued with a conjuncture of unlucky events to thrust me out of a possibility of keeping the path of rectitude, to curse me by an irreconcilable war between my duty and my nearest wishes, and to damn me with a choice only of different species of error and misconduct.

I dare trust myself no farther with the subject. The following song is one of my latest productions, and I send it to you, as I would do any thing else, because it pleases myself:—

Thou ling'ring star, with less'ning ray,
That lov'st to greet the early morn, &c.[1]

R. B.

No. XLIII.

LEADHILLS, Thursday noon, Aug. 1791.

I have received both your letters, Madam, and ought, and would have answered the first long ago; but on what subject could I write you? How can you expect a correspondent should write you when you declare that you mean to preserve his letters with a view, sooner or later, to expose them on the pillory of derision and the rack of criticism? This is gagging me completely as to speaking the sentiments of my bosom; else, Madam, I could perhaps too truly

Join grief with grief, and echo sighs with thine.

I have perused your most beautiful, but most pathetic poem[2]—do not ask me how often or with what emotions. You know that "I dare to *sin*, but not to lie!" Your verses wring the confession from my inmost soul—I will say it, expose it as you please—that I have, more than once in my life, been the victim of a damning conjuncture of circumstances; and that to me you must be ever

Dear as the light that visits these sad eyes.

I have just, since I had yours, composed the following stanzas. Let me know your opinion of them.

Sensibility how charming,
Thou, my friend, canst truly tell, &c.[3]

I have one other piece in your taste; but I have just a snatch of time.

Now Nature hangs her mantle green
On every blooming tree, &c.[4]

[1] See vol. iii. p. 58.

[2] All traces of this poem and of the two letters referred to in the opening sentence of the above epistle seem to be lost.

[3] See vol. iii. p. 119. [4] See vol. iii. p. 88.

Such, my dearest Nancy, were the words of the amiable but unfortunate Mary. Misfortune seems to take a peculiar pleasure in darting his arrows against "honest men and bonnie lasses." Of this you are too, too just a proof; but may your future fate be a bright exception to the remark! In the words of Hamlet,

Adieu, adieu, adieu! Remember me.

R. B.

No. XLIV.

DUMFRIES, 23d November, 1791.

It is extremely difficult, my dear Madam, for me to deny a lady anything; but to a lady whom I regard with all the endearing epithets of respectful esteem and old friendship, how shall I find the language of refusal? I have, indeed, a shade of the lady, which I keep, and shall ever keep in the *sanctum sanctorum* of my most anxious care. That lady, though an unfortunate and irresistible conjuncture of circumstances has lost me her esteem, yet she shall be ever to me

Dear as the ruddy drops that warm my heart.

I am rather anxious for her sake, as to her voyage. I pray God my fears may be groundless.[1] By the way, I have this moment a letter from her, with a paragraph or two conceived in so stately a style that I would not pardon it in any created being except herself; but, as the subject interests me much, I shall answer it to you, as I do not know her present address. I am sure she must have told you of a girl, a Jenny Clow,[2] who had the misfortune to make me a father, with contrition I own it, contrary to the laws of our most excellent constitution, in our holy Presbyterian hierarchy.

Mrs. M— tells me a tale of the poor girl's distress that makes my very heart weep blood. I will trust that your goodness will apologize to your delicacy for me, when I beg of you for Heaven's sake, to send a porter to the poor woman—Mrs. M., it seems, knows where she is to be found—with five shillings in my name; and, as I shall be in Edinburgh on Tuesday first, for certain, make the poor wench leave a line for me, before Tuesday, at Mr. Mackay's, White Hart Inn, Grassmarket, where I shall put up; and before I am two hours in town, I shall see the poor girl, and try what is to be done for her relief. I would have taken my

[1] The above letter appeared in the authorized "Clarinda Correspondence" published by the lady's grandson, W. C. M'Lehose, in 1843. In the editions of the poet's works edited by the Rev. G. Gilfillan and Mr. W. Scott Douglas, it is headed "To Mrs. M'Lehose, Edinburgh." From the context of the letter itself, however, we think it more reasonable to infer that it was addressed to some intimate friend of Mrs. M'Lehose, perhaps Mary Peacock, in answer to one from that lady soliciting Burns to send her the silhouette of her friend executed by Miers (see letter xxv. and note). At this date Mrs. M'Lehose's voyage to the West Indies to rejoin her husband had been determined on, and her intimate friend's wish to gain possession of her portrait was natural. It seems likely that the lady who received the letter gave it to her friend as the best way of delivering the message, that Mrs. M'Lehose had kept it, that it had been found among her papers after her death, and that it had been published in the Correspondence under the careless assumption that it was addressed to her. We see no reason that Burns had to address the "divine Clarinda" of the previous year herself in this indirect manner.

[2] In August, 1787, Burns was apprehended on a fugæ warrant at the instance of a servant-girl, most probably the Jenny Clow referred to, who was then, to use his own phrase, "under a cloud" on his account in Edinburgh. On the 15th he found security to her satisfaction, and was released. The letter from Mrs. M'Lehose which seems to have roused the poet's ire from being "conceived in so lofty a style" reads as follows:—

SIR, November, 1791.

I take the liberty of addressing a few lines in behalf of your old acquaintance Jenny Clow, who, to all appearance, is at this moment dying. Obliged, from all the symptons of a rapid decay to quit her service, she is gone to a room almost without common necessaries, untended and unmourned. In circumstances so distressing, to whom can she so naturally look for aid as to the father of her child, the man for whose sake she has suffered many a sad and anxious night, shut from the world with no other companions than guilt and solitude? You have now an opportunity to evince you indeed possess these fine feelings you have delineated, so as to claim the just admiration of your country. I am convinced I need add nothing farther to persuade you to act as every consideration of humanity as well as gratitude must dictate. I am, Sir, your sincere well-wisher,

A. M.

Both Jenny Clow and her child may be supposed to have been dead when Alderman Shaw's committee, in 1804, made provision for Burns's other illegitimate children. Whether she was the "Highland wench in the Cowgate," that he speaks of in writing to Thomson, as having borne him "three bastards at a birth," we cannot tell.

boy from her long ago, but she would never consent.

I shall do myself the very great pleasure to call for you when I come to town, and repay you the sum your goodness shall have advanced. . . . and most obedient.

R. B.

No. XLV.

DUMFRIES, 15th December, 1791.

I have some merit, my ever dearest of women, in attracting and securing the heart of "Clarinda." In her I met with the most accomplished of all womankind, the first of all God's works; and yet I, even I, had the good fortune to appear amiable in her sight.

By the by, this is the sixth letter that I have written you since I left you;[1] and if you were an ordinary being, as you are a creature very extraordinary—an instance of what God Almighty in the plenitude of his power, and the fulness of his goodness can make!—I would never forgive you for not answering my letters.

I have sent in your hair, a part of the parcel you gave me, with a measure, to Mr. Bruce the jeweller in Prince's Street, to get a ring done for me. I have likewise sent in the verses "On Sensibility," altered to

Sensibility how charming,
Dearest Nancy, thou canst tell, &c.

to the editor of the "Scots Songs," of which you have three volumes, to set to a most beautiful air—out of compliment to the first of women, my ever-beloved, my ever-sacred "Clarinda." I shall probably write you tomorrow. In the meantime, from a man who is literally drunk, accept and forgive!!

R. B.

[1] In letter xliv. Burns speaks of his intention of visiting Edinburgh within a few days. He reached that city on the 29th November, and spent over a week in it. In the softened feelings arising from the contemplation of her approaching voyage to Jamaica to join her husband, Clarinda relented so far as to allow her platonic lover to call on her. Their last meeting took place on Tuesday evening the 6th December. The reconciliation seems to have been complete and the parting exquisitely tender. From the context it appears that Burns resumed the correspondence with all his former eagerness, but that the lady was not so liberal in her replies.

No. XLVI.

DUMFRIES, 27th Dec. 1791.

I have yours, my ever dearest Madam, this moment. I have just ten minutes before the post goes; and these I shall employ in sending you some songs I have just been composing to different tunes, for the "Collection of Songs" of which you have three volumes, and of which you shall have the fourth:

Ae fond kiss and then we sever;
Ae fareweel, and then for ever, &c.[2]

Behold the hour, the boat arrive!
My dearest Nancy, O farewell, &c.[3]

Ance mair I hail thee, thou gloomy December!
Ance mair I hail thee wi' sorrow and care, &c.[4]

The rest of this song is on the wheels. Adieu. Adieu.[5]

R. B.

[2] See vol. iii. p. 121. [3] See vol. iii. p. 254.
[4] See vol. iii. p. 122.

[5] The lady's departure from Scotland was gradually drawing nearer. On the 25th Jany. 1792 (his birthday) she addressed him a letter which, as being the last of the correspondence on her part which is preserved, and otherwise as being characteristic and interesting, we give in full:—

"25th January, 1792.

"Agitated, hurried to death, I sit down to write a few lines to you, my ever dear, dear friend. We are ordered aboard on Saturday to sail on Sunday. And now, my dearest sir, I have a few things to say to you, as the last advice of her, who could have lived or died with you! I am happy to know of your applying so steadily to the business you are engaged in; but, oh remember, this life is a short passing scene! Seek God's favour—keep His commandments—be solicitous to prepare for a happy eternity! There, I trust, we will meet, in perfect and never ending bliss. Read my former letters attentively; let the religious tenets there expressed sink deep into your mind; meditate on them with candour, and your accurate judgment must be convinced that they accord with the words of Eternal Truth! Laugh no more at holy things, or holy men: remember, 'without holiness, no man shall see God.' Another thing, and I have done: as you value my peace, do not write me to Jamaica, until I let you know you may with safety. Write Mary often. She feels for you! and judges of your present feelings by her own. I am sure you will be happy to hear of my happiness: and I trust you will—soon. If there is time, you may drop me a line ere you go, to inform me if you get this, and another letter I wrote you on the 21st, which I am afraid of having been neglected to be put into the post-office.

"So it was the *Roselle*, you were to have gone in! I read your letter to-day, and reflected deeply on the ways of Heaven! To us they often appear dark and doubtful; but let us do our duty faithfully, and sooner

No. XLVII.

[DUMFRIES, March, 1793.]

I suppose, my dear Madam, that by your neglecting to inform me of your arrival in Europe[1]—a circumstance that could not be indifferent to me, as, indeed, no occurrence relating to you can—you meant to leave me to guess and gather that a correspondence I once had the honour and felicity to enjoy, is to be no more. Alas! what heavy-laden sounds are these—"No more!" The wretch who has never tasted pleasure, has never known woe; what drives the soul to madness is the recollection of joys that are "no more." But this is not language to the world: they do not understand it. But come ye few—the children of Feeling and Sentiment! ye whose trembling bosom-chords ache to unutterable anguish, as recollection gushes on the heart! ye who are capable of an attachment, keen as the arrow of Death and strong as the vigour of Immortal Being—come! and your ears shall drink a tale—But, hush! I must not, cannot tell it; agony is in the recollection, and frenzy in the recital.

But, Madam, to leave the paths that lead to madness, I congratulate your friends on your return; and I hope that the precious health, which Miss Peacock tells me is so much injured, is restored or restoring. There is a fatality attends Miss Peacock's correspondence and mine. Two of my letters, it seems, she never received; and her last, which came when I was in Ayrshire, was unfortunately mislaid, and only found about ten days or a fortnight ago, on removing a desk of drawers.

I present you a book:[2] may I hope you will accept of it? I daresay you will have brought your books with you. The fourth volume of the Scotch Songs is published; I will presume to send it you. Shall I hear from you? But first hear me. No cold language—no prudential documents; I despise advice and scorn control. If you are not to write such language, such sentiments as you know I shall wish, shall delight to receive, I conjure you, by wounded pride! by ruined peace! by frantic disappointed passion! by all the many ills that constitute that sum of human woes, a broken heart!!!—to me be silent for ever. If ever you insult me with the unfeeling apophthegms of cold-blooded caution, may all the—but hold! a fiend could not breathe a malevolent wish on the head of my angel! Mind my request—If you send me a page baptised in the font of sanctimonious prudence, by heaven, earth, and hell, I will tear it to atoms! Adieu; may all good things attend you.[3]

R. B.

No. XLVIII.

[CASTLE DOUGLAS, 25th June, 1794.]

Before you ask me why I have not written you, first let me be informed of you *how* I shall write you! "In friendship," you say; and I have many a time taken up my pen to try an epistle of "Friendship" to you; but it will not do; 'tis like Jove grasping a pop-gun, after having wielded his thunder. When I take up the pen, recollection ruins me. Ah! my ever dearest Clarinda! Clarinda!—what an host of memory's tenderest offspring crowd on my fancy at that sound! But I must not indulge that subject—you have forbid it.

or later we will have our reward, because 'the Lord God Omnipotent reigns.' Every upright mind has here cause to rejoice. And now, Adieu. May Almighty God bless you and yours! take you into His blessed favour here and afterwards receive you into His glory! Farewell. I will ever remain your friend, A. M

[1] Mrs. M'Lehose's return to Edinburgh took place in August, 1792 (see our Introduction to the Clarinda Correspondence). Burns, writing to her friend, Mary Peacock, on the 6th December of that year, speaks of his former divinity as a "far-distant person!" Miss P. sent a reply stating that her friend had returned, but that reply, as we see from the above letter, was mislaid, and not found till long afterwards.

[2] No doubt the new edition of his poems.

[3] The whole of the above letter is given, with the exception of the two or three closing sentences, in the Clarinda Correspondence of 1843. This melodramatic production was transcribed by its author, in the complete form given above, into the Glenriddell collection of his MS. letters, where it is headed "Letter to a Lady, never scrolled, but copied from the original Letter." At the end, Burns himself appends the misleading note:—"I need scarcely remark that the foregoing was the fustian rant of enthusiastic youth." "Fustian rant" describes the effusion accurately enough, but "enthusiastic youth" cannot be fairly admitted as an excuse for the poet, who was at this date thirty-four years old, and complaining to other correspondents of experiencing the sensations peculiar to premature old age.

I am extremely happy to learn, that your precious health is re-established, and that you are once more fit to enjoy that satisfaction in existence, which health alone can give us. My old friend Ainslie has indeed been kind to you. Tell him, that I envy him the power of serving you. I had a letter from him a while ago, but it was so dry, so distant, so like a card to one of his clients, that I could scarcely bear to read it, and have not yet answered it. He is a good honest fellow; and *can* write a friendly letter, which would do equal honour to his head and his heart; as a whole sheaf of his letters I have by me will witness: and though Fame does not blow her trumpet at my approach *now*, as she did *then*, when he first honoured me with his friendship, yet I am as proud as ever; and when I am laid in my grave, I wish to be stretched at my full length, that I may occupy every inch of ground which I have a right to.

You would laugh were you to see me where I am just now!—would to Heaven you were here to laugh with me! though I am afraid that crying would be our first employment. Here am I set, a solitary herm!t, in the solitary room of a solitary inn, with a solitary bottle of wine by me—as grave and as stupid as an owl—but, like that owl, still faithful to my old song; in confirmation of which, my dear Mrs. Mac., here is your good health! May the hand-waled [hand-picked] benisons o' Heaven bless your bonnie face; and the wratch wha skellies [looks askance] at your weelfare, may the auld tinkler deil get him, to clout his rotten heart! Amen.

You must know, my dearest Madam, that these now many years, wherever I am, in whatever company, when a married lady is called on as a toast, I constantly give you; but as your name has never passed my lips, even to my most intimate friend, I give you by the name of Mrs. Mac. This is so well known among my acquaintances, that when my married lady is called for, the toast-master will say—"O, we need not ask him who it is—here's Mrs. Mac.!" I have also, among my convivial friends, set on foot a round of toasts, which I call a round of Arcadian Shepherdesses; that is, a round of favourite ladies, under female names celebrated in ancient song; and then you are my Clarinda. So, my lovely Clarinda, I devote this glass of wine to a most ardent wish for your happiness!

> In vain would Prudence, with decorous sneer,
> Point out a cens'ring world, and bid me fear:
> Above that world on wings of love I rise,
> I know its worst, and can that worst despise,
> "Wrong'd, injur'd, shunn'd, unpitied, unredrest,
> The mock'd quotation of the scorner's jest,"
> Let Prudence' direst bodements on me fall,
> Clarinda, rich reward! o'erpays them all![1]

I have been rhyming a little of late, but I do not know if they are worth postage.—Tell me what you think of the following monody.

MONODY ON A LADY FAMED FOR HER CAPRICE.

How cold is that bosom which folly once fir'd, &c.[2]

The subject of the foregoing is a woman of fashion in this country, with whom at one period I was well acquainted. By some scandalous conduct to me, and two or three other gentlemen here as well as me, she steered so far to the north of my good opinion, that I have made her the theme of several ill-natured things. The following epigram struck me the other day as I passed her carriage.[3]

[1] The poem, itself a fragment, to which the above belongs, will be found in vol. iii. p. 21.

[2] The monody will be found in vol. iii. p. 170—the subject of it being Mrs. Walter Riddell, of Woodley Park.

[3] This is the epigram beginning

> If you rattle along like your Mistress's tongue.

which will be found in vol. iii. p. 174. Referring to the epigram, Chambers justly remarks:—"To have given expression to such sentiments regarding a female, even though a positive wrong had been inflicted, would have been totally indefensible, and still more astounding is it to find that the bard could have thought of exhibiting such an effusion to another female," and that, too, several months after the quarrel had taken place.

n who it is—
so, among my
ound of toasts,
Shepherdesses;
ladies, under
ient song; and
So, my lovely
wine to a most
!

decorous sneer,
l bid me fear:
ove I rise,
worst despise,
pitied, unredrest,
orner's jest,"
s on me fall,
s them all![1]

e of late, but I
postage.—Tell
owing monody.

HER CAPRICE.

ly once fir'd, &c.[2]

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By some scan-
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carriage.[3]

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vol. iii. p. 170—the
Riddell, of Woodley

stress's tongue.

174. Referring to
emarks:—"To have
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